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## ABSTRACT

This report of a Texas task force centers on state policy for educating students with disabilities, the foundation for the policy, and strategies for implementing the policy goals. The 32-member task force included teachers, school administrators, parents, community service professionals, and others. The need for restructuring services for students with disabilities is discussed, with attention to characteristics of students in special education, including grade level patterns, gender, race and ethnicity, types of disabilities, instructional settings, testing results, and retention and dropout rates. The policy statement is presented, focusing on mission and philosophy; assessment, curriculum, and instruction; professional growth and development; organization; and family and community. Five concepts underlying the policy are identified: individualization, collaboration, communication, integration, and transformation. Issues and recommendations are considered for each area of the policy statement. Immediate first steps in the implementation of the policy for education of students with disabilities are presented in chart form, indicating roles for each part of the education system. (Contains 51 references.) (SW)

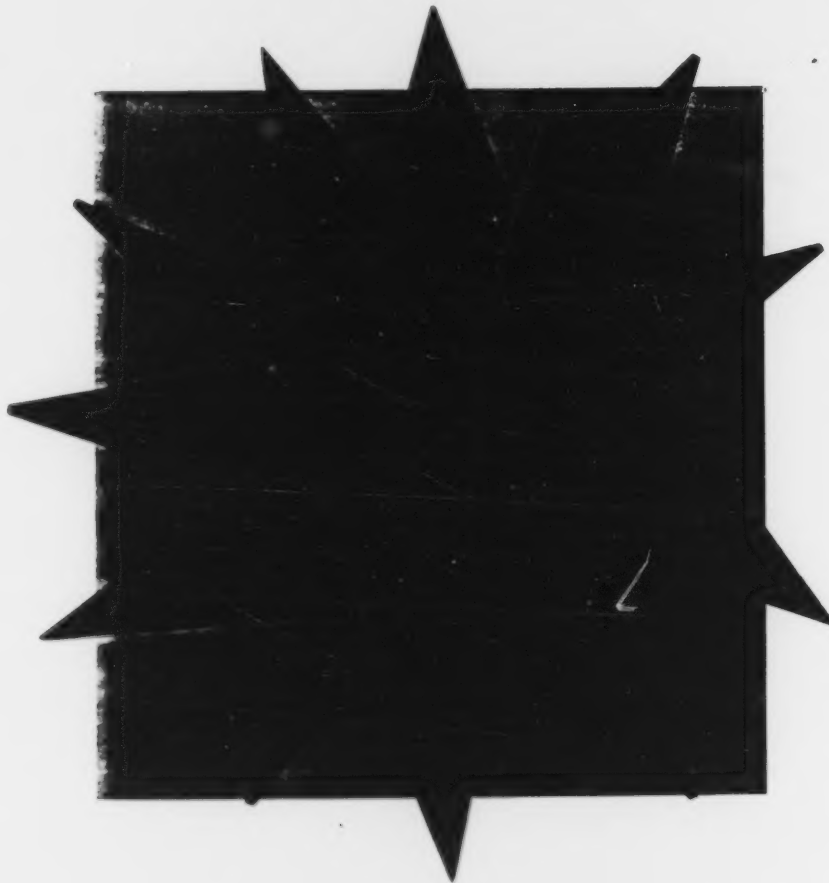
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# HIGH EXPECTATIONS:

*Creating Success for Every Student*



REPORT OF THE TASK FORCE ON THE  
EDUCATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

TEXAS EDUCATION AGENCY  
AUSTIN, TEXAS

NOVEMBER 1994

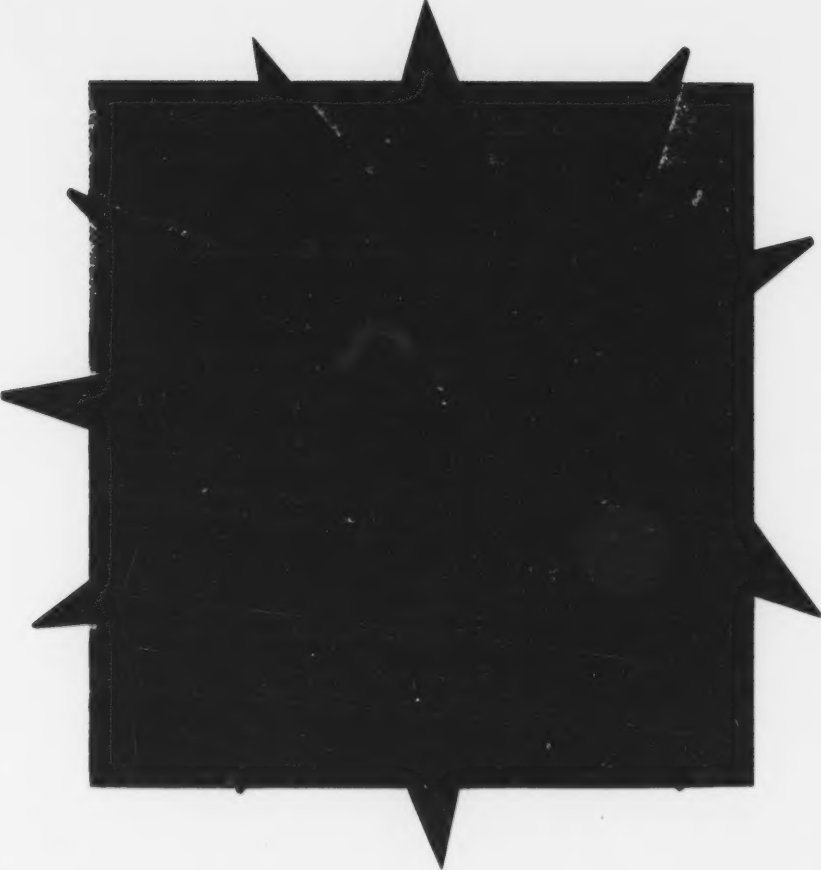
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|                                               |    |
|-----------------------------------------------|----|
| FOREWARD .....                                | 9  |
| POLICY STATEMENT .....                        | 11 |
| OVERVIEW .....                                | 15 |
| QUESTIONS & ANSWERS .....                     | 21 |
| THE CASE FOR RESTRUCTURING .....              | 25 |
| MISSION AND PHILOSOPHY .....                  | 37 |
| RECOMMENDATIONS .....                         | 40 |
| ASSESSMENT, CURRICULUM, AND INSTRUCTION ..... | 41 |
| RECOMMENDATIONS .....                         | 50 |
| PROFESSIONAL GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT .....     | 51 |
| RECOMMENDATIONS .....                         | 55 |
| ORGANIZATION .....                            | 57 |
| RECOMMENDATIONS .....                         | 62 |
| FAMILY AND COMMUNITY .....                    | 65 |
| RECOMMENDATIONS .....                         | 70 |
| IMPLEMENTATION STEPS .....                    | 71 |
| RECOMMENDATIONS .....                         | 74 |
| RESOURCES .....                               | 81 |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....                        | 85 |

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## FOREWARD

The Task Force on the Education of Students with Disabilities was established by the Texas State Board of Education in September 1993 and given the following charge:

*The task force will examine the condition of special education services in Texas and develop a policy to increase the achievement of students needing special education services and to promote excellence and equity for all students in achieving real world results. Developed in light of the current condition of special education services, discussions with Texas citizens, and the opinions of experts, the policy will complement current policies on early childhood, elementary, middle, and high school education. The task force will present the policy and recommendations to the State Board of Education and the Commissioner of Education.*

### MEMBERSHIP

The task force was composed of teachers, one paraprofessional, school administrators, parents, community service professionals, one university professor, one business professional, and individuals who fulfilled multiple roles as parents, education professionals, or local school board members. The task force members also represented a balance of interests and backgrounds in special and regular education. Slightly

more than half the parents on the task force had children receiving regular education services. Teachers and administrators on the task force were evenly divided between those carrying out regular and special education assignments. Five members of the State Board of Education and representatives of the Texas Department of Mental Health Mental Retardation, the Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services, and the Texas Rehabilitation Commission served as *ex officio* members.

### POLICY DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The task force met during the 1993-94 school year. In addition to hearing presentations from expert speakers, parents, teachers, and agency staff, the task force generated the set of ideas upon which the language of the policy was developed. At seven public hearings across the state, the task force received oral testimony from 252 individuals and written testimony from 38 individuals. In addition to the public hearings, task force members visited 35 schools to observe the educational programs offered students with disabilities and to discuss issues with regular and special educators, students, and others. In order to familiarize themselves with a variety of programs, task force members visited programs ranging across urban, suburban, and rural settings, as well as elementary, middle/intermediate, and high schools, and one community college. Among

the variety of classrooms and programs observed were self-contained special education classes for students whose disabilities would be considered severe and profound; regular education classes containing students with disabilities such as visual or hearing impairments, learning disabilities, and emotional disturbances; classes offered through Regional Day School Programs for the Deaf; and adaptive behavior classes. From the community college visit, the task force members gathered information about the transition of students with disabilities from a secondary to post-secondary educational setting. From this comprehensive development process, the task force formed the policy and recommendations for implementation. Decisions about the ideas and recommendations presented in the policy and this report were made by consensus.

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## REPORT ORGANIZATION

The report centers around the policy on the education of students with disabilities developed by the task force and adopted by the State Board of Education in July 1994. The recommendations and the report itself contain the views of the majority of the task force, present the foundation upon which they developed the policy, and suggest strategies for implementation of the adopted policy.

The report begins with an analysis of the need for restructuring services for students with disabilities. Next, the report moves through each section of the policy, discussing the relevant information read, heard, or observed which led the task force to its views. Then, it presents the recommendations for implementing the policy goals and statements contained in that section. Finally, the report identifies immediate first steps in the implementation of this policy. The task force believes the changes resulting from the implementation of this policy for students with disabilities will ultimately improve the education of all students throughout the state, promoting both excellence and equity throughout the public education system.

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# POLICY STATEMENT

## MISSION

The vision of the educational system in Texas is to support the intellectual, academic, linguistic, social, emotional, and physical development of all students to their full educational potential. It is the responsibility of all members of the educational community to provide appropriate services to all students with disabilities that promote maximum access to opportunities for their individual development and future employment and independent living, as well as participation in their communities. The ultimate goal of service delivery for students with disabilities is their integration and participation in the general education program when it meets the identified needs of each student. This mission statement complements previously adopted Mission Statements for Early Childhood and Elementary Education, Middle School Education, and High School Education and recognizes students with disabilities as equally valued members of those student bodies.

## PHILOSOPHY

Graduates of Texas schools lead successful lives as contributing members in their families, in their employment and educational endeavors, in their social and leisure activities, and in their communities. These results are possible through an educational system

designed to set high expectations, value individual differences, and recognize that students, regardless of disability, are students first. This system is grounded in an educational philosophy that embraces each student and promotes family and community partnerships. This philosophy recognizes that each child, whatever his or her level of ability, has significant contributions to make, both as a child and as an adult. Recognizing that most students with disabilities use the same curriculum and assessment as other students, special services or modifications are provided to all students who require them in order to benefit from their educational program.

The philosophy of the delivery of services to students with disabilities is individually focused, recognizes learning differences, and promotes the development of students by challenging them to grow intellectually, academically, linguistically, socially, emotionally, and physically through participation in the entire life of the school. Service delivery is designed to meet student needs through an array of educational environments and is not determined by setting or funding source. It promotes the dignity of the individual and the family, fostering a sense of belonging for all students regardless of background or abilities. Service delivery decisions are based on a belief of shared responsibility for the preparation of all students for future success among all educators, parents, students, and community members.

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## ASSESSMENT, CURRICULUM, AND INSTRUCTION

Appropriate assessment, curriculum, and instruction are provided and modified, as needed, to support the continuous progress of each student with disabilities toward explicit goals set forth in an individual plan. Designing this plan, based upon initial assessments to identify specific needs, is a shared responsibility among parents, students, administrators, teachers, and school support personnel. Individuals from social service agencies and others also participate, when appropriate. The design process includes teachers prepared to work with students in general education classes, as well as teachers with more specialized training. The plan is designed to maintain high expectations for each student's growth and achievement from all educational personnel, family members, and the student. The goals in the individual plan create a comprehensive educational experience, appropriate to each individual, that prepares each student for meaningful and productive employment, further education, recreation, and independent living.

The education of students with disabilities occurs through a variety of individualized strategies and in a variety of settings designed to preserve and promote both the student's dignity and opportunity to gain meaningful and valued knowledge and skills. Because positive social interaction enhances learning, the educational system provides options for meaningful peer-to-peer interactions among and between students with and without disabilities. Teachers and support staff engage all students in learning experiences in the classroom and throughout the school that are challenging, developmentally and age-appropriate, meaningful, and realistic. Although mutual learning and many valuable experiences occur naturally among students with and without disabilities, effective educators intentionally create a climate that addresses the needs of students with disabilities for social acceptance and support within the classroom and throughout the school. Teachers, administrators, and support staff integrate instructional resources and technology into classroom curriculum and instruction modified in ways that support the learning processes of students with disabilities and promote classroom interactions.

Most students participate in the same assessment process. For students with disabilities, assessments are selected, added, or modified on an individual basis to provide the most valid information about their progress in achieving the intellectual, academic, linguistic, social, emotional, and physical goals established in their individual plans. Teachers modify classroom assessment or develop alternative means to judge more accurately the effectiveness of instruction for students with disabilities. As a result of these assessments, teachers make adjustments in curriculum and instruction to enhance the progress and achievement of individual students.

All students, including students with disabilities, are expected to participate in self-evaluation and goal-setting. Based upon high quality information from an array of sources about student progress and learning, students, family members, and educators discuss options and make informed decisions about the students' educational programs.

While most students will receive the same curriculum, teachers provide modifications for students with disabilities to address the needs specified in each student's individual plan. The curriculum provides multiple opportunities for intellectual, academic, linguistic, social, emotional, and physical growth and achievement. Acquiring skills and knowledge for transition to a meaningful adult life is a priority of long range planning for students with disabilities.

Success in educating students with disabilities is reached through appropriate and accessible school and community learning opportunities created to meet the unique needs of each child. Campuses and districts responsible for the education of students with disabilities are accountable for student learning and growth toward the goals specified in individual plans. The state accountability system incorporates information on the progress and achievement of students with disabilities in meeting individual plans. Success is achieved when students participate in the economic, social, civic, and cultural activities of their community.

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## **PROFESSIONAL GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT**

The entire school staff creates a culture that appreciates diversity among students; models a welcoming attitude toward students with disabilities and their parents in the school, classroom, and community; and holds high expectations for student progress and achievement.

Administrators, teachers, and support staff possess comprehensive and specific knowledge and skills needed to implement a variety of curricular, instructional, and assessment modifications and to use a variety of staffing arrangements to develop the unique strengths of their students, as well as meet their individual needs. Teachers with more specialized training support other educators in meeting specific student needs. School staff are knowledgeable about the challenges facing students with disabilities outside of school and strive to enable students with disabilities to transfer what is learned in school to other settings. Dedicated to expanding their knowledge and skills to better serve the emerging needs of students with disabilities, school staff actively seek appropriate opportunities for professional development and for sharing with others the knowledge and skill gained.

Administrators, teachers, and support staff are prepared through preservice and inservice programs to work collegially with other professionals and the staffs of social service agencies and community organizations for the benefit of their students. School staff are prepared to support the families of students with disabilities through frequent, sensitive, and open communication about the educational needs, progress, and achievements of their children. School staff are knowledgeable of family, school, and community resources available to support students with disabilities and are able to connect these resources to benefit their students. School staff advocate for students with disabilities by educating the wider community about students' needs, hopes, and achievements. School staff consistently exhibit the highest levels of professional and ethical conduct in their work with students and families.

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## **ORGANIZATION**

A unified organizational structure of the educational system reflects the shared responsibility for the education of every student. It allows for the full array of services and settings for all students, recognizing and protecting individual strengths and addressing individual needs. The structure fosters maximum collaboration between educators who have been trained in general and specialized fields, enhancing the ability of the system to promote individual growth and achievement. Funding for the delivery of services to students with disabilities is determined by what services are delivered rather than where services are delivered.

Organizational flexibility in areas such as staffing, funding, educational setting, the instructional day and calendar, assessment, and planning time enhances the ability of educators to meet the individual needs of each student. State and local accountability systems incorporate students with disabilities, measuring the effectiveness of instructional practices in meeting short-term and long-term goals. Those responsible for the delivery of services to students with disabilities engage in a continuous process of evaluation and improvement activities.

## **FAMILY AND COMMUNITY**

Schools are the centers linking a variety of services to students and their families. Strong partnerships among various agencies enhance coordinated service delivery and reflect the uniqueness of the local community. Regardless of the nature of the service delivery, it is focused on long-term objectives for successful integration of the students into the life of their communities.

School staff welcome parents as partners in the educational process and seek to foster positive, supportive interactions between home and school, valuing parental knowledge and expertise concerning their children. Schools involve parents in training, evaluation, and decision making opportunities. All participants in the education and service delivery process, including students' parents, educators, and other community service agencies, share information concerning available resources. Educators take responsibility for educating parents of students with disabilities concerning their rights and responsibilities.

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Educators, parents, post-secondary education and training organizations, the business community, and other service providers support joint planning activities for the coordination of services and transition to post-secondary educational or career activities. Business and school partnerships are essential in identifying job opportunities and skill requirements for students receiving special services. School and work-based training opportunities are provided for students with various abilities, challenging their further growth and development intellectually, academically, linguistically, physically, emotionally, and socially. Post-secondary education and training programs offer

opportunities for students to increase their skill and knowledge and facilitate future employment and independent living.

Coordinated staff training programs and planning play a critical role in successful delivery of services from various agencies. Service delivery is designed to fit the needs of the individual student and family, with parental and student preferences playing a key role in developing a comprehensive long range plan and coordinating the development of short-term objectives and service delivery plans.

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## OVERVIEW

The Task Force on the Education of Students with Disabilities was created by the State Board of Education in September 1993 and directed to:

- examine the condition of special education services in Texas and,
- develop a policy to increase the achievement of students needing special education services, promoting excellence and equity for all students in achieving real world results.

The 32 members of the task force included teachers, one paraprofessional, school administrators, parents, community service professionals, one business professional, one university professor, and individuals who fulfilled multiple roles as parents, education professionals, or local school board members. The task force members also represented a balance of interests and backgrounds in special and regular education. Five members of the State Board of Education and representatives of the Texas Department of Mental Health Mental Retardation, the Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services, and the Texas Rehabilitation Commission served as *ex officio* members.

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This initiative is the fourth in a series addressing the education of Texas students. Previously adopted policies for early childhood/elementary, middle grade, and high school education lay the foundation for future reform, opening the door to local innovation within a broad framework defining quality education for all students. Since the state has specific responsibilities with regard to the education of students with disabilities, the State Board of Education established this task force to develop a policy that further defines and integrates those policies, recognizing that the previously adopted policies are relevant to students with disabilities as valued members of those student bodies.

The task force, through its review of current research and statewide data on services to students with disabilities, as well as consideration of public testimony, discussions with educators and others around the state, and opportunities to visit regular and special education programs in schools, developed a policy which provides a framework for the restructuring of services for students with disabilities. This framework emphasizes the importance of designing services based on individual strengths and needs, promoting the holistic development of students in a variety of areas, and working in concert with all parties to achieve long-term goals.

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## THE NEED FOR CHANGE

The task force's review of background information, combined with reading materials, discussions, classroom visits, and expert speakers, identified several important issues in relation to special education services. The background information indicated that males and African Americans were over-represented in current special education programs. The achievement gap between students with and without disabilities increased as students progressed through school. Coupled with the achievement gap are higher retention rates for students with disabilities, indicating lack of academic success. Life after leaving the public schools, in terms of employment, further education, or leisure activities, for students with disabilities has not reached a level of participation comparable to students without disabilities. Clearly, providing students with disabilities an equitable and excellent education presents a challenge for schools.

In response to rising public expectations for higher levels of achievement and acquisition of more complex skills for all students, schools have begun the process of restructuring their organization, curricula, instruction, assessment, staff development, and community relationships. The policies previously adopted by the State Board of Education for early childhood/elementary, middle, and high school education specifically call for widespread restructuring of schools. The restructuring that occurs in response to those policies, as well as the *Policy Statement on the Education of Students with Disabilities* (1994) must incorporate a commitment to improve services for students with disabilities.

One trend brought to the attention of the task force is an educational initiative called "the inclusion movement." The task force studied the subject of inclusion extensively, through readings and presentations by expert speakers, in order to understand the issues involved. Based upon the philosophy that all students should be educated in the regular classroom in the neighborhood school with nondisabled peers accompanied by appropriate training and supports, the inclusion movement has generated both strong support and strong reservations among parents and educators. Moving beyond the concepts of least restrictive environment and mainstreaming, inclusion supporters seek to

open classroom doors closed to students with disabilities and change fundamental attitudes in school and society toward those students. The issue of inclusion has been framed also in terms of a student's civil right to an integrated educational setting. In addition, those favoring inclusion seek both access to the full academic curriculum, as well as opportunities for social interaction with nondisabled, age-appropriate peers. Those who had reservations about inclusion focused mainly on their concern that students with sensory impairments could not have all of their educational needs met in the regular classroom. They were also concerned that for some students with disabilities who had already been unsuccessful in the regular classroom, particularly students with emotional disturbances or learning disabilities, inclusion would close off other placement options. It was generally agreed that, while inclusion in school or the community should be the goal for all students with disabilities, some students with more intensive disability-specific needs will need time in alternative settings. Those with reservations also believed that it is the civil right of students with disabilities to have the opportunity to an education equal to that provided students without disabilities. If students were included who do not have the skills to access the regular curriculum, then they would not have their civil rights met. Task force members were also concerned that inclusion of students with disabilities would place unrealistic demands upon teachers, leading to reduced achievement for students without disabilities. How to respond to the inclusion movement framed many task force deliberations.

Another issue that emerged addressed the quality and preparation of educators in terms of meeting the needs of students with disabilities. *The National Agenda for Achieving Better Results for Children and Youth with Disabilities* (1994) lists professional development as one of the critical reform issues. The task force heard examples of specific needs that professional development might address: changing teacher attitudes toward students with disabilities, lack of self-confidence in ability to teach students with disabilities, lack of background and skill to make modifications in regular classrooms, and lack of teamwork skills. Low certification standards for sign language interpreters, as well as shortages of interpreters and itinerant teachers who provide occupational and physical therapy, orientation and mobility, and speech therapy, were also issues brought to the attention of the task force.

In addition, concerns about the working relationships between schools, families, and communities were raised. Because of increasingly diverse student and community populations, schools face new challenges as they strive to meet even the traditional expectations of teaching the basic curriculum. Employers' expectations for entry-level skills have moved from basic reading, writing, and computation to skills in problem-solving and teamwork. The needs of students with disabilities demand improved working relationships between families and schools, as well as schools and the larger community. Addressing these demands for new working relationships among all who are responsible for educating students with disabilities was an issue brought to the task force.

The effectiveness of special education programming given the increasing numbers of students served and the increasing costs emerged as another important issue examined by the task force. *Issues & Options In Restructuring Schools and Special Education Programs* (1992) suggests establishing a system of accountability for all educational programs as one fundamental component of school reform. If one indicator of success of the special education program is the success of its students after leaving public school, then the task force determined there is reason to be concerned. The Texas longitudinal study of the experiences of students with disabilities examined success in employment, independent living, recreation, and post-secondary education. Jobs held by students with disabilities tended to be low paying, part-time, entry-level positions in service occupations with little expectation for significant advancement. A large proportion of students with disabilities lived with parents after leaving public school. Within the first year of leaving school, leisure activities for students with disabilities changed from interacting with social groups to more independent activities, such as reading and watching television. Socializing with individuals who are not disabled declined. Only 25 percent of the students with disabilities attended post-secondary school during the year after leaving public school. Although these findings are preliminary, they are reflective of the results of the National Longitudinal Transition Study of Special Education Students. That study also examined the academic records of students with disabilities throughout secondary school and found that grades were lower for students with disabilities in academic classes than in other classes. Additionally, the study found that students with disabili-

ties took fewer academic classes as they progressed through secondary school. The national movement toward world class standards in core content areas and the Texas recommended high school program hold the potential to significantly affect the curriculum offered and the performance expectations for all students in Texas schools. How that reform movement will incorporate the needs of students with disabilities for appropriate learning opportunities is a continuing issue of concern. Clearly, preparing students for life after school is a significant challenge for schools, one which must be addressed more effectively.

## A NEW VISION

There are five fundamental concepts that underlie the policy: individualization, collaboration, communication, integration, and transformation. Change should be undertaken when it serves to make these concepts a reality in our schools and classrooms.

Building upon the policy for high school education which calls for individual education plans for every student, this task force extends that recommendation to all students with disabilities at all grade levels. Within this context, the task force came to value the systemic flexibility needed to foster creative responses necessary to help each student realize full academic, intellectual, linguistic, physical, emotional, and social potential.

Through the policy development process, many task force members came to believe in the need for systemic reform, reflecting the particular strengths of schools and communities across the state, that would enable educators to produce better outcomes for all students, including those with disabilities. In such a system, accustomed roles would be altered, and all educators, not only special educators, would accept the education of students with disabilities as an inherent responsibility. Collaboration and teamwork will be called for: collaboration among teachers; collaboration among teachers and administrators; collaboration among school personnel and other service providers; collaboration among school personnel and parents; collaboration among teachers and students; and collaboration among students themselves. Teachers in such a system will view themselves not as specialists, but as generalists, working across disciplines to diagnose and solve student learning problems.

The task force envisions a system where teamwork is the norm and open communication is a valued feature. Everyone involved in the education of students would talk and listen simply as individuals interested in the best education possible for all students, without needing to filter what is said or heard through preconceived perceptions of the various roles represented. Benefitting students would take precedence over protecting what exists in terms of organizational structure or educators' roles. The task force made a commitment to value the voice of each participant in the policy development process, whether it was the voice of a classroom teacher, a student, a paraprofessional, a parent, a researcher, or a special educator. That same commitment must be made by all individuals responsible for improving the education of students as they discuss reforms over the coming months and years in every school. The reform process will be long, complex, and challenging for all involved. However, the rewards, in terms of students better served within their classrooms, schools, and communities, becoming more productive and happier in their daily living, will justify the effort.

Over the policy development process, the task force encountered individuals and groups advocating various positions regarding the inclusion movement. The task force recognized that the educational system must be restructured if more students, decided on a student-by-student basis and appropriately supported, are to receive their education in regular education classrooms in their neighborhood schools. This must be balanced by the preservation of other options for students with specific disability needs. The task force acknowledges that there will always be a need to provide special services to some students, but also believes the system should not unnecessarily limit who may provide quality instruction or where it may take place. Likewise, when students need intense support or instruction or have specific needs related to their disability, they must have access to an appropriate setting and must be served by educators with disability-specific knowledge and skill. Regardless of where the education of students with disabilities takes place, it must be remembered that the ultimate goal of service delivery is the integration and participation of students with disabilities in the full regular educational program when it meets the identified needs of each student.

## IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

The task force calls for a comprehensive, coordinated effort to improve the quality of education for students with disabilities. As the state sets standards for what students are to know and be able to do, expectations for students with disabilities must be incorporated into those standards. As the state designs and selects ways of holding schools accountable for student progress and achievement, students with disabilities must be included in that system. The task force recommends that all state level educational initiatives, especially those to revise and reform curriculum and assessment, recognize and respond to issues related to students with disabilities as an integral part of the initiative.

In calling for a unified organizational structure, the task force reinforces its belief that all educators are responsible for the education of all students. Through a unified structure, the task force sees a realistic avenue for achieving educational excellence and equity for all students, including those with disabilities. The task force calls upon the state, regional, and local educational agencies to move toward an organization structure where special education is not considered a separate educational system. Educator preparation and certification requirements must support a more unified system in which educators are better prepared to meet a wider spectrum of student needs within the restructured classroom. The task force recommends that the Texas Education Agency initiate efforts to revise state and federal statutes or regulations which require the labeling of students as a requirement for receiving special education services. These labels reinforce the perception of separate systems of education for students with and without disabilities. These reforms present a considerable challenge and will require a carefully designed change process accompanied by long-term commitment of adequate resources.

This policy impacts everyone responsible for the education of students with disabilities from birth through age 21: the schools' professional and non-professional staff members, families, and community service agencies. By the intent of this policy statement and federal legislation, business and community organizations have enhanced responsibilities to employ and support individuals with disabilities after leaving school. The

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broadest possible distribution of this policy statement is essential to initiate dialogue among all those who must be involved. As stakeholders participate in the restructuring process, they are more likely to make and sustain the substantive changes required for students with disabilities to lead more productive lives.

From all stakeholders, the task force heard a common theme, that to improve the education of students with disabilities will require better prepared school staff members, especially classroom teachers. The State Board of Education's policy statement and the task force's recommendations cannot be accomplished without significant investments of time and money in high quality professional development. Learning to work in instructional teams and other flexible arrangements will require not just inservice awareness sessions, but sustained support as changes are implemented within the classroom. Educator preparation programs must demonstrate that teachers and administrators exiting those programs are better prepared to make and support curricular and instructional modifications to accommodate various disabilities. As teachers acquire new knowledge and skills, they will need time to reflect upon the success of their new practices and time to plan together with other educators to individualize instruction for all students. The task force calls upon the legislature to provide the financial support to gain the time and expertise needed to improve the education of students with disabilities.

One of the first concerns voiced by the task force was a concern that the policy actually have an impact, that it would not be just a statement adopted by the State Board of Education and then ignored in practice by educators and others. Indeed, the first question often asked of task force members as they met in schools or held public hearings was, "What happens next?" The task force recommends that the Texas Education Agency conduct an annual review of the implemen-

tation status of the *Policy Statement on the Education of Students with Disabilities* (1994) and report the results to the State Board of Education.

As districts and campuses restructure educational programs and changes occur in schools and classrooms, rich opportunities to study and disseminate what is learned often slip away. This task force supports the design and implementation of a program of research focused upon the changes made in classrooms, campuses and districts, and communities in response to this policy statement and the task force recommendations. Such a program of research would examine changes in student growth, development, and achievement associated with restructuring schools for all students, as well as improving services for students with disabilities. There is a need for comprehensive, longitudinal research that will systematically identify creative ideas and effective suggestions for improving educational practice. These ideas and suggestions can then be disseminated and adapted by other classrooms, campuses, and communities.

The task force strongly believes that the time for making a unified system of service delivery a reality in the state of Texas is now. The state should not undertake reform agendas that do not fully incorporate services for students with disabilities. Nor will reforms gained in the education of students with disabilities survive in the absence of general education reform. As reform focuses on educating an increasingly diverse student body, both special education and regular education have expertise to contribute toward that goal.

Systemic reform, reform involving all levels and participants in the educational system, becomes more and more critical as changes in our society increase. Such reform is absolutely necessary, and further, now is the time to create a system engineered to ensure success for all students and for all those called to educate them.

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## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

### QUESTION:

Since the State Board of Education's policies on early childhood/elementary, middle grades, and high school apply to all students, why is there a separate policy for the education of students with disabilities?

### ANSWER:

The State Board of Education established the Task Force on the Education of Students with Disabilities to develop a policy complementary to the policies already in place for early childhood/elementary, middle grade, and high school education. This policy also addresses more specifically those conditions which must exist if students with disabilities are to achieve equity and excellence in the public education system. Each of the policies is stated in the present tense, recognizing that the conditions envisioned in each may not be current practice but where the state plans to be in the future.

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### QUESTION:

How does this policy relate to the documents, *A Leadership Initiative for Improving Special Education Services in Texas* and *A Leadership Initiative for Improving the Education of Students Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing*, produced by the Texas Education Agency in 1992?

### ANSWER:

The documents, *A Leadership Initiative for Improving Special Education Services in Texas* and *A Leadership Initiative for Improving the Education of Students Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing*, were developed to provide guidance in improving achievement of students with disabilities. After a series of public hearings around the state, the State Board of Education established the Task Force on the Education of Students with Disabilities to develop a policy statement. This policy statement and the leadership initiatives contain many of the same concepts. Because the *Policy Statement on the Education of Students with Disabilities* was adopted by the State Board of Education, it takes precedence over the leadership initiatives. To the extent that there is lack of congruence between the policy statement and the initiatives, the leadership initiatives will be revised.

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**QUESTIONS:**

Does this policy mandate inclusion? Does the policy seek to abolish the array of settings? Doesn't the emphasis on individualization to meet identified needs stress separation of students rather than integration?

**ANSWER:**

As a policy of the State Board of Education, this statement does not mandate inclusion. Instead, it seeks to provide the state with direction and guidance for improving the education of all students, including those with disabilities. The task force placed primary emphasis upon meeting the needs of each student with all other considerations becoming secondary. Because some students may benefit most from services delivered in specialized settings, the task force recommended retaining all setting options where services designed to meet individual needs are provided.

**QUESTION:**

How does the policy affect the legal rights and privileges of students with disabilities?

**ANSWER:**

As a policy, this statement does not affect any rights guaranteed students with disabilities by state or federal law. Specifically, program planning for students eligible for special education services continues on an individual basis with the admission, review, and dismissal committee (ARD) writing the individual education plan (IEP) and determining placement in accordance with federal law. In addition, students with handicapping conditions who do not qualify for special education services are protected from discrimination under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. This policy establishes a vision for students with disabilities which reaches beyond these legal sanctions to affect perceptions and shape actions toward a shared responsibility.

**QUESTIONS:**

How will this policy affect students without disabilities, especially gifted and talented students? Won't having special education students in the regular classroom slow down the academic progress of students without disabilities?

**ANSWER:**

This policy both depends upon and contributes to restructured schools for all students, schools that are student-centered. That significant learning occurs when students communicate with other students who bring different perspectives and abilities to the task is well documented. Having opportunities for diverse learners to work together in the regular classroom does not mean that teachers should not nor cannot meet the individual needs of students, whatever their characteristics or needs. Neither does it mean that teachers cannot use flexible grouping for instruction. It does mean that classrooms and schools must be restructured, more flexible, and more responsive to students' needs, as well as the needs of educators for training and support. As schools are restructured to become more student-centered, then academic achievement will not decrease, but will improve for all students.

**QUESTIONS:**

How will teachers be able to give all students the same curriculum and assessments? Will teachers have to water down the curriculum to serve students with disabilities in the regular classroom? Will schools be able to reach rigorous academic expectations if students with disabilities are moved into regular classrooms more often?

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**ANSWER:**

All students must have access to a high quality curriculum that moves them toward achievement of broadly stated learning goals. To ensure that all students have this access, schools must provide training and instructional support to classroom teachers so that the task of delivering individualized instruction becomes more manageable. The task force expects the majority of students with disabilities to complete a high quality curriculum when modifications are provided to meet their individual needs. Likewise, students with disabilities will participate in the assessments expected of all students, modified, if needed, to provide them an equitable opportunity for success.

**QUESTION:**

Why is support for teachers and students so crucial to improving services for students with disabilities?

**ANSWER:**

Educational programming for students with disabilities occurs on an individual basis, designed to meet identified educational needs. For students to be successful learners, the support they require must accompany them to the classroom. Likewise, teachers need supports in order to meet the specific needs of students with disabilities in their classrooms. Supports may take the form of adjustments to student-teacher ratios when students who need additional teacher time and attention are part of the classroom. Supports for teachers and students may also take other forms, such as consulting with another professional who has expertise in the specific disability, more time to work individually, different equipment or materials, or another pair of hands in the classroom. The educational success of students with disabilities depends in large measure on the availability of appropriate educational supports.

**QUESTION:**

Why would the task force recommend that students with disabilities be included in the state accountability system?

**ANSWER:**

To the extent that many students with disabilities are excluded from the state accountability system, schools and districts may be inclined to focus attention and resources more fully on those who are included. As schools and districts provide all students a well-rounded, high quality curriculum, then more students should be prepared for success as measured by the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). It also means that alternate ways to measure progress for some students with disabilities must be developed. These alternative measures should be incorporated into the accountability system for Texas schools. The state accountability system should include, rather than exclude, students with disabilities.

**QUESTIONS:**

What about safety concerns? What happens when a student who is identified as emotionally disturbed behaves inappropriately in a regular education class or when a student who is medically fragile needs immediate attention?

**ANSWER:**

Every student, with or without disabilities, must be assured a safe place to learn. This means that support and alternatives are readily available to both students and teachers as the need arises. Schools must be structured and staffed so that all students receive what they need to be successful. Since trained individuals should be available to provide medical services to students, educators would not be expected to perform these tasks. School staff should be trained in basic emergency first aid and CPR, in case of accident or injury to any student on campus.

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**QUESTION:**

How will relationships among communities, families, and schools be affected as educational services to students with disabilities are improved?

**ANSWER:**

Strengthened linkages between communities, families, and schools form the foundation of the policy. Open communication facilitates these new linkages. These linkages recognize and reinforce the interdependence of all who work toward the highest levels of achievement and development for students with disabilities. As students with disabilities become better prepared at every level of schooling to assume fuller adult roles, communities, families, and schools must be responsive to those new expectations for employment, recreation, civic responsibilities, and further educational opportunities.

**QUESTION:**

For this policy to work, won't schools, administrators, and teachers have to operate in very different ways than they do now?

**ANSWER:**

Educators must continue to refine and extend their skills, as well as adjust attitudes and perceptions, to accommodate the changing nature of the student population and society's expectations. As schools strive to improve services to students with disabilities, increased demands will be placed upon educators; however, these increased demands must be accompanied by increased support for educators and students. As school professionals seek to better serve all students, they must engage in a process of continuous professional growth and skill development. In doing so, they model a commitment to life-long learning for their students and communities.

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## THE CASE FOR RESTRUCTURING

The task force began its work by reviewing the status of special education services and emerging state and national trends and issues. The task force found a picture of continued growth nationally in the numbers of students identified for special education services and in the level of funding designated to support those services. Since 1976, when the Education for All Handicapped Children Act took effect, the number of students identified nationally for special education services increased from 3,708,913 to 4,817,503 by 1990. Nationally, the cost of special education programming increased from \$1 billion in 1977 to \$30 billion in 1994 (*U.S. News and World Report*, 1994). In Texas public schools, the number of students identified for special education services increased from 158,712 in 1977 to 350,398 in 1990. In the 1992-93 school year, 365,292 individuals or 10 percent of those enrolled in Texas schools were identified for special education services. That year, school districts in Texas budgeted over 13 percent of their operating expenses to the special education program (TEA, October 1993). The increasing numbers of students identified to receive special education services at increasing costs was a fundamental concern to be addressed by the task force.

One trend brought to the attention of the task force is an educational initiative called "the inclusion movement." The task force studied the subject of inclusion extensively, through readings and presentations by

expert speakers, in order to understand the issues involved. Based upon the philosophy that all students should be educated in the regular classroom in the neighborhood school with nondisabled peers accompanied by appropriate training and supports, the inclusion movement has generated both strong support and strong reservations among parents and educators. Moving beyond the concepts of least restrictive environment and mainstreaming, inclusion supporters seek to open classroom doors closed to students with disabilities and change fundamental attitudes in school and society toward those students. The issue of inclusion has been framed also in terms of a student's civil right to an integrated educational setting. In addition, those favoring inclusion seek both access to the full academic curriculum, as well as opportunities for social interaction with nondisabled, age-appropriate peers. Those who had reservations about inclusion focused mainly on their concern that students with sensory impairments could not have all of their educational needs met in the regular classroom. They were also concerned that for some students with disabilities who had already been unsuccessful in the regular classroom, particularly students with emotional disturbances or learning disabilities, inclusion would close off other placement options. It was generally agreed that, while inclusion in school or the community should be the goal for all students with disabilities, some students with more intensive disabil-

ity-specific needs will need time in alternative settings. Those with reservations also believed that it is the civil right of students with disabilities to have the opportunity to an education equal to that provided students without disabilities. If students were included who do not have the skills to access the regular curriculum, then they would not have their civil rights met. Task force members were also concerned that inclusion of students with disabilities would place unrealistic demands upon teachers, leading to reduced achievement for students without disabilities. How to respond to the inclusion movement framed many task force deliberations.

Another issue that emerged addressed the quality and preparation of educators in terms of meeting the needs of students with disabilities. *The National Agenda for Achieving Better Results for Children and Youth with Disabilities* (1994) lists professional development as one of the critical reform issues. The task force heard examples of specific needs that professional development might address: changing teacher attitudes toward students with disabilities, lack of self-confidence in ability to teach students with disabilities, lack of background and skill to make modifications in regular classrooms, and lack of teamwork skills. Low certification standards for sign language interpreters, as well as shortages of interpreters and itinerant teachers who provide occupational and physical therapy, orientation and mobility, and speech therapy, were also issues brought to the attention of the task force.

In addition, concerns about the working relationships between schools, families, and communities were raised. Because of increasingly diverse student and community populations, schools face new challenges as they strive to meet even the traditional expectations of teaching the basic curriculum. Employers' expectations for entry-level skills have moved from basic reading, writing, and computation to skills in problem-solving and teamwork. The needs of students with disabilities demand improved working relationships between families and schools, as well as schools and the larger community. Addressing these demands for new working relationships among all who are responsible for educating students with disabilities was an issue brought to the task force.

The effectiveness of special education programming given the increasing numbers of students served and the increasing costs emerged as another important issue examined by the task force. *Issues & Options In Restructuring Schools and Special Education Programs* (1992) suggests establishing a system of accountability for all educational programs as one fundamental component of school reform. If one indicator of success of the special educational program is the success of its students after leaving public school, then the task force determined there is reason to be concerned. The Texas longitudinal study of the experiences of students with disabilities examined success in employment, independent living, recreation, and post-secondary education. Jobs held by students with disabilities tended to be low paying, part-time, entry-level positions in service occupations with little expectation for significant advancement. A large proportion of students with disabilities lived with parents after leaving public school. Within the first year of leaving school, leisure activities for students with disabilities changed from interacting with social groups to more independent activities, such as reading and watching television. Socializing with individuals who are not disabled declined. Only 25 percent of the students with disabilities attended post-secondary school during the year after leaving public school. Although these findings were preliminary, they are reflective of the results of the National Longitudinal Transition Study of Special Education Students. That study also examined the academic records of students with disabilities throughout secondary school and found that grades were lower for students with disabilities in academic classes than in other classes. Additionally, the study found that students with disabilities took fewer academic classes as they progressed through secondary school. The national movement toward world class standards in core content areas and the Texas recommended high school program hold the potential to significantly affect the curriculum offered and the performance expectations for all students in Texas schools. How that reform movement will incorporate the needs of students with disabilities for appropriate learning opportunities is a continuing issue of concern. Clearly, preparing students for life after school is a significant challenge for schools, one which must be addressed more effectively.

#### NLTS: CHARACTERISTICS OF SECONDARY STUDENTS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

The National Longitudinal Transition Study of Special Education Students, a six-year, national study of 8,000 youth with disabilities, provides a description of youth who participated in special education in secondary school, as well as their lives after school.

##### Background Characteristics

- The majority of secondary students with disabilities had cognitive learning problems. More than half were learning disabled and nearly one-fourth were mentally retarded. The average IQ for secondary students with disabilities was 79.
- They are more likely than their peers to be male, poor, African American, and from single parent households. In 1986, 68 percent of students with disabilities and 40 percent of students without disabilities lived in households with less than \$25,000 annual income. One-fourth of youth in the general population were living in single-parent households, the situation for 37 percent of students with disabilities.

##### Secondary School Experiences

- More than 90 percent of students with disabilities attended regular schools; however, more than one-third of youth with visual impairments or multiple disabilities and two-thirds of the youth with hearing impairments attended special schools.
- Students with disabilities earned lower grades than their nondisabled peers; they achieved an average GPA of 2.3 compared to the 2.6 GPA of the general population. They earned approximately half the credits needed for graduation through academic classes, an average of 12 academic credits. Their grades were lower in academic classes than in other classes, and they took fewer academic classes each year as they moved through high school.
- Two-thirds of the secondary school students with disabilities failed at least one course during high school and most of those were students with serious emotional disturbances or learning disabilities.
- By 12th grade, 89 percent of students with disabilities were taking a vocational education class; one-third took a concentration of vocational classes, at least four classes in a single skill area. Only one in four participated in a work experience program.
- Students with hearing and visual impairments took academic classes and pursued post-secondary education at

virtually the same rate as students in the general population.

- Students with disabilities spent 70 percent of their class time in regular education classes. Time spent ranged from a high of 87 percent for students with visual impairments to a low of 32 percent for students with multiple disabilities. Nearly one-quarter were fully included in regular education classes, while 3 percent spent their time entirely in special education classes. Substantial differences were found among students with the same disability.

##### After School Experiences

- A disproportionate number of students with disabilities dropped out of school: 38 percent compared to 24 percent of students without disabilities. Rates were disproportionately high for students with serious emotional disturbances, learning disabilities, mental retardation, and other health impairments.
- Approximately half of the students with serious emotional disturbances dropped out of school. Within five years of leaving school, 75 percent had been arrested.
- Forty-six percent of the youth with disabilities who have been out of school up to two years were competitively employed. Within five years of leaving school, the rate for the general population had increased to 69 percent while that of youth with disabilities had increased to 57 percent.
- Few students with disabilities moved into post-secondary education. Fewer than one-third, a rate less than half that of the general population, attended post-secondary education in the three to five years after leaving school.
- Overall, 19 percent of students with disabilities had been arrested within two years of leaving school; after three years, the rate was 30 percent. For high school dropouts with disabilities, the arrest rate was even higher; 56 percent had been arrested within three years. The majority of arrests involved students with serious emotional disturbances, of whom 58 percent had been arrested.

—Compiled from *The National Agenda for Achieving Better Results for Children and Youth with Disabilities*, June 1994, and testimony presented by Dr. Mary Wagner, Project Director of the National Longitudinal Transition Study of Special Education Students, to the Subcommittee on Select Education and Civil Rights of the House Committee on Education and Labor, March 10, 1994.

In addition to examining state and national issues and trends, the task force reviewed basic statistical information regarding students with disabilities. Patterns related to grade levels, gender, ethnicity, disabilities represented, instructional settings, retention and dropping out, and academic achievement formed the foundation for the policy recommendations generated by the task force.

## GRADE LEVEL PATTERNS

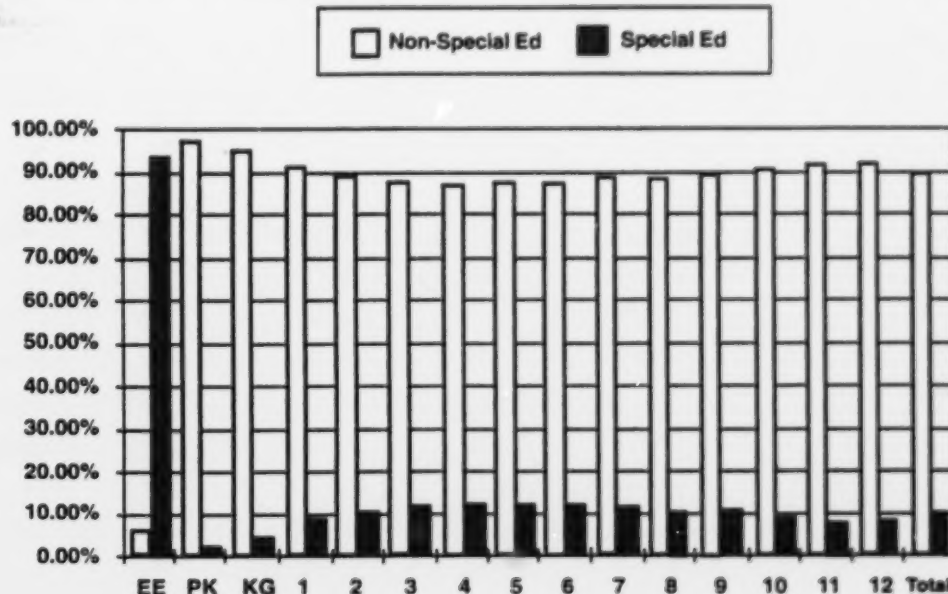
In 1992-93, approximately 10 percent of the students attending Texas public schools received special education services. The number of students receiving special education services varied widely at different grades. (Figure 1.) The highest participation rate in special education services (93.8 percent) occurred in early education (EE). Early education includes Early Childhood Intervention (ECI), Preschool Programs for Children with Disabilities (PPCD), Head Start, Title XX, and other programs for students not actually placed in a state approved pre-kindergarten program. Early education also includes migrant three-year-olds.

The ECI programs are provided for infants from birth to age three who are developmentally delayed. PPCD programs are provided for students ages three through five. Children who are visually or auditorially impaired become eligible for special education services at birth. The very nature of the eligibility requirements for these programs explains the high participation rate in special education services occurring at this grade level.

In contrast to early education, pre-kindergarten classes had the lowest participation rate in special education services (2.5 percent). State-funded pre-kindergarten classes are provided for students who are three or four years old and unable to speak and comprehend the English language or from a family whose income, according to standards set by the State Board of Education, is at or below subsistence level.

Although relatively small numbers of students in kindergarten and first grade were identified for special education services (4.8 and 8.6 percent, respectively), the largest increase in the participation

Figure 1. Percentage of Special Education Participants and Non-Participants by Grade Level (1992-93)



rate occurred between kindergarten and first grade. Excepting early education, the highest special education participation rates occurred in grades 3 through 6, with rates ranging from 12.1 percent to 12.7 percent.

Significant numbers of students participating in special education services also qualified as at-risk or economically disadvantaged: 47.7 percent of participants were considered at-risk and 52.2 percent were considered economically disadvantaged, percentages well above those of non-special education participants. A high proportion of students participating in special education also participated in vocational programs.

### GENDER PATTERNS

Texas schools enrolled approximately equal numbers of male and female students. However, a different ratio emerges in special education: males received special education services at a rate nearly twice as high as females, 13.6 percent to 6.9 percent, respectively. The highest participation rates for both males and females occurred at grade 4, with 16.5 percent and 8.6 percent, respectively, receiving services. (Figure 2.)

### RACE AND ETHNICITY PATTERNS

Of the total number of students participating in special education, 50.5 percent were White, 31.6 percent were Hispanic, and 16.9 percent were African American. Less than 1 percent were Asian or Native American. This compares with an overall state student population representation of 48.4 percent for White students, 34.9 percent for Hispanic students, 14.3 percent for African American students, and 2.4 percent for Asian or Native American students. (Figures 3. and 4.) Kindergarten presented a different participation pattern from other grades: 61.2 percent of the students receiving special education services were White, 25.1 percent were Hispanic, and 12.9 percent were African American. The highest participation rate for White students was in kindergarten. Hispanic students reached their highest participation in grade 5 with 34.3 percent, while African American students reached their highest proportion in grade 12 at 19.1 percent.

When special education participation is examined within each ethnic group, differences in participation rates were evident. Across all grades, 12.2 per-

**Figure 2. Comparison of Special Education Participants and Non-Participants by Gender (1992-93)**

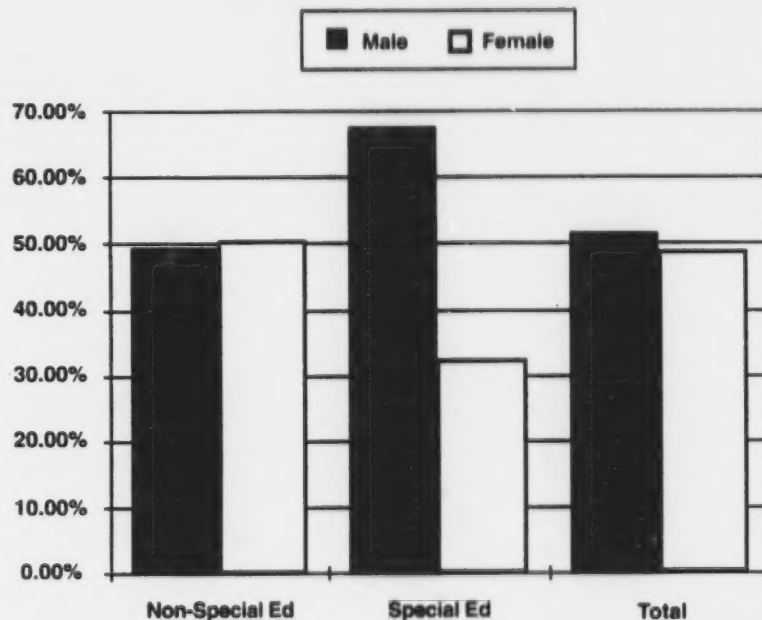


**Figure 3. Race / Ethnicity of Special Education Non-Participants (1992-93)**

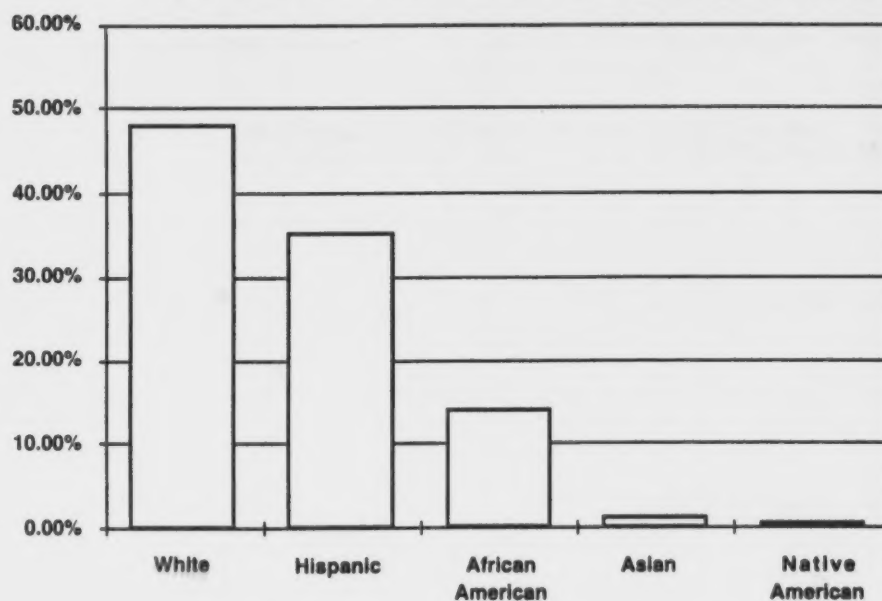


**Figure 4. Race / Ethnicity of Special Education Participants (1992-93)**

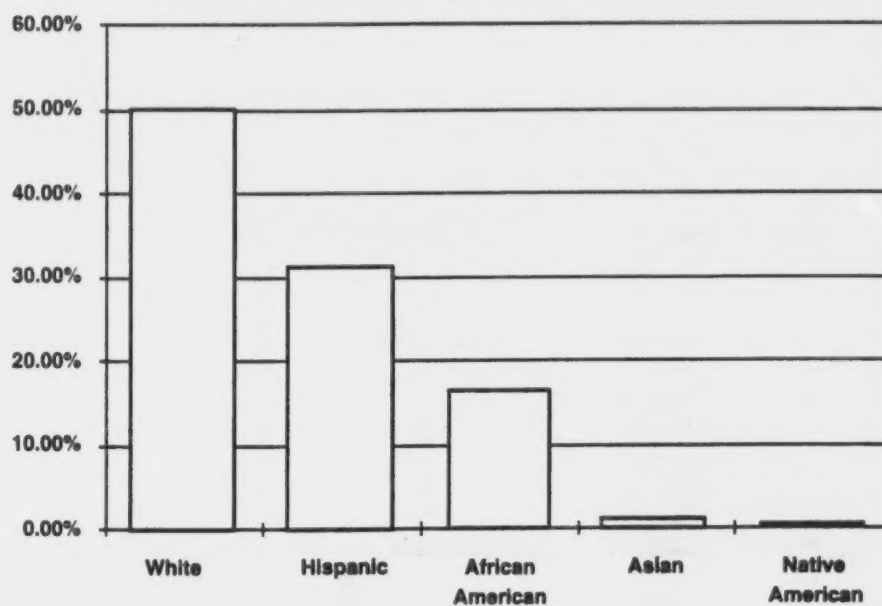
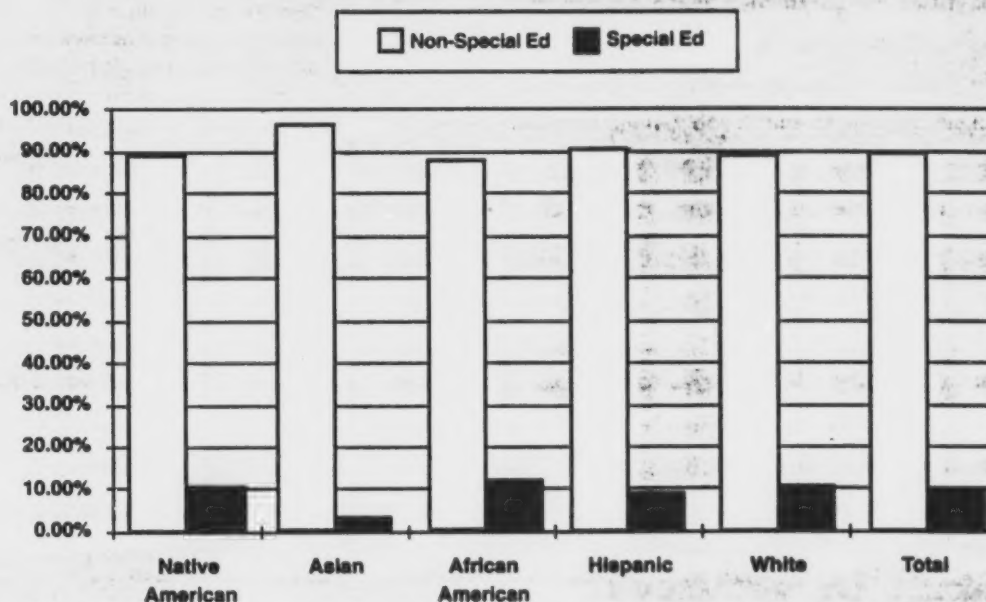


**Figure 5. Percentage of Special Education Participants and Non-Participants Within Racial / Ethnic Groups (1992-93)**



cent of African American students, 10.8 percent of White students, 10.6 percent of Native American students, 9.3 percent of Hispanic students, and 3.4 percent of Asian students received special education services. Participation rates for special education services reached their peaks at grade 5 for Native American students (16.9 percent), African American students (15.1 percent), and Hispanic students (12.3 percent). The peak for White students occurred in grade 3 at 13.1 percent. (Figure 5.)

#### **PATTERNS FOR ETHNICITY, GENDER, AND SPECIAL EDUCATION PARTICIPATION**

Within ethnic groups, males and females exhibited different participation patterns. The male participation rate across all ethnic groups was nearly twice that of females, a pattern which also held within each ethnic group. The highest rate of female participation within any ethnic group was associated with African Americans (8.0 percent), followed by Native Americans (7.9 percent), Whites (7.2 percent), Hispanics (6.4 percent), and Asians (2.3 percent). The highest participation rate for males within any ethnic group was for

African American males, where 16.3 percent of males were participants. White (14.2 percent), Native American (13.1 percent), and Hispanic (12.2 percent) males showed roughly similar participation rates.

#### **DISABILITY PATTERNS**

The numbers of students with various health impairments remained relatively constant across grades; however, this is not the case for other disability categories. More than half of the students receiving special education services were learning disabled, while the next most frequent group (23.1 percent) was comprised of students with speech impairments. No other disability accounted for more than 8.0 percent of the students receiving special education services. (Figure 6.)

Several trends emerged when looking at the numbers of students receiving special education services at different grades.

- Students with speech impairments represented by far the largest group receiving special education services from early education through grade 3, peaking at 70.2 percent in grade 1.
- Beginning with grade 4, students with learning

**Figure 6. Percentage of Special Education Participants by Disability**

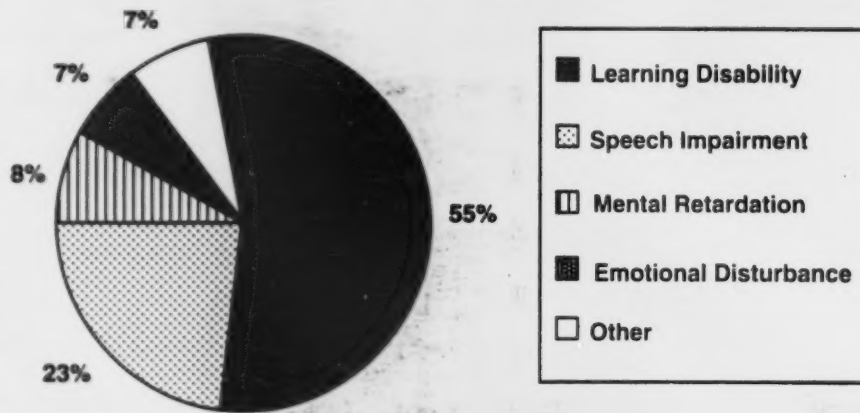
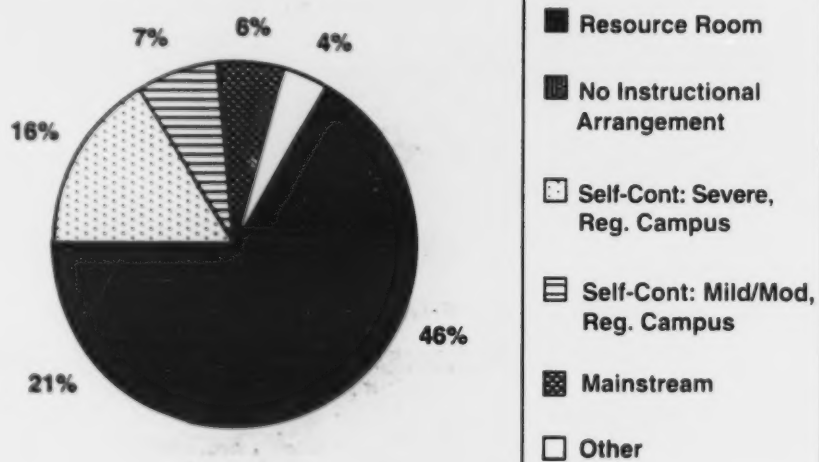


**Figure 7. Percentage of Special Education Participants by Instructional Arrangement**



disabilities represented the majority of the students receiving special education services. By grade 9, 72.0 percent of the students receiving special education services were learning disabled.

- The percentage of students with mental retardation increased from kindergarten (5.9 percent) through grade 12 (18.6 percent). Students with disabilities who have not yet reached 22 and who have not yet graduated are probably included in grade 12, thereby making mental retardation the second most frequent category at that grade.
- The percentage of students with emotional disturbances increased from 1.4 percent in kindergarten to peak in grade 9 at 11.8 percent.

## **PATTERNS IN INSTRUCTIONAL SETTINGS**

Nearly half the students with disabilities are served in the resource room. In 1992-93, students were counted in the resource room setting when they received special education instruction or related services in a school district setting for less than 50 percent of the regular school day. Regardless of the percent of time the student spent in special education, this setting included any supportive special education services provided in the regular education classroom such as that provided directly by helping teachers or aides/interpreters. The resource room setting, which reached the point of heaviest use in grades 5 through 9, was the most commonly used setting for students with learning disabilities. Approximately 78 percent of the students with learning disabilities were served in the resource room in grades 4 through 6. (Figure 7.)

Twenty percent of the students with disabilities were served without a special instructional setting, most commonly those receiving speech therapy. The next most common instructional arrangements were self-contained classrooms on the regular campus for students with severe disabilities or with mild/moderate disabilities. In 1992-93, the self-contained severe setting provided special education instruction and related services for students with severe disabilities in a self-contained program for most of the regular school day. These students were attending no more than two regular education classes. The self-contained mild/moderate setting provided special education instruction and related services to students with mild or moderate disabilities in the self-contained program for 50 percent

or more of the regular school day. Together, these instructional arrangements were used by approximately 24 percent of the students with disabilities. Students with mental retardation were served most frequently (66.3 percent) in the self-contained severe setting on the regular campus.

The mainstream instructional arrangement was used for 6 percent of students with disabilities. To be counted in this setting in 1992-93, students received indirect special education services, such as curricular or instructional modifications, special equipment, consultation or incidental direct services, while being maintained in the regular classroom.

Students with emotional disturbances were most often served on the regular campus in either the resource room or the self-contained classroom for students with severe disabilities. Use of the self-contained classroom was more common through grade 3, when the resource room became the more frequent setting.

## **RETENTION AND DROPOUT PATTERNS**

Being retained in grade and dropping out of school are indicators of student non-success. Students with disabilities differed from their nondisabled peers in these two areas. In school year 1992-93, almost 163,000 students were either retained in grade (PK-8) or not advanced to the next grade (9-12). Of these, over 27,000 or 17 percent were students participating in special education. Retention rates for students receiving special education services are higher than those for their peers; the overall annual rates are 7.8 percent compared to 4.4 percent. The highest retention rate for students with disabilities occurred in grade 1 where 21.7 percent were retained, while the second highest rate occurred in grade 9 with 16.7 percent retained. The highest retention rate for students without disabilities occurred in grade 9 at 14.1 percent.

In 1991-92, 9.1 percent of school dropouts were special education participants. Of the 4,858 reported special education dropouts, 20.8 percent failed to return in the fall even though they were promoted. In general, the proportion of dropouts who were special education participants decreased through high school grades. Students with learning disabilities represented 42.9 percent of the reported special education dropouts.

Failure to return to school in the fall after being promoted was especially high in grades 7 (52.5 percent) and 8 (47.2 percent). Beginning in grade 9, students were more likely to drop out during the regular school year.

When dropout patterns from different ethnic groups were examined in terms of special education participation, it is evident that patterns vary across ethnic groups. Of the students participating in special education, Whites dropped out at the highest rate (11.1 percent), followed by African Americans (9.1 percent), Hispanics (7.9 percent), and Native Americans (6.8 percent).

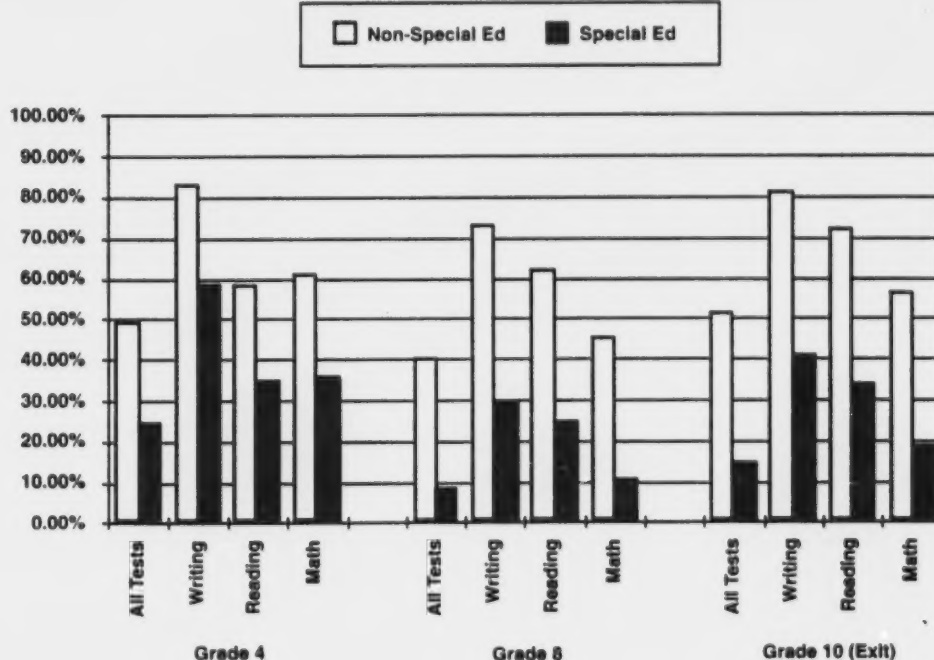
### ASSESSMENT PATTERNS

The Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) provides information relative to the performance of students participating in special education compared to their peers. In 1993, TAAS tests for writing, reading, and mathematics were given in grades 4, 8, and 10. Students with disabilities may be exempted from the TAAS through the admission, review, and dismissal

process and the individual education plan prepared for each student who receives special education services. According to the Spring 1993 reports, exemptions for special education participants ranged from 6 percent of the total student population at grade 4 to 4 percent in grade 10. (Figure 8.)

Moving from grade 4 to grade 10, the gap between special education participants and non-participants, reported in terms of percentage of students passing a particular test, steadily increased. For example, for the grade 4 writing examination, 83 percent of the non-special education participants and 59 percent of the special education participants passed. By grade 10, 81 percent of non-special education participants had passed while 41 percent of the special education participants had done so. When looking at the percentage of students who passed all three tests, the gap between participants and non-participants also grew. In grade 4, 25 percent of special education participants passed all three tests compared to 49 percent of non-special education participants. By grade 10, only 15 percent of the special education participants passed all three tests while 51 percent of the non-participants did so.

Figure 8. Percentages of Special Education Participants and Non-Participants Passing Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) (1992-93)



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## STATE FUNDING PATTERNS

State funds for special education are distributed through the Foundation School Program. State statute defines instructional arrangements for special education services and establishes cost adjustment weights for each instructional arrangement, such as resource room or vocational adjustment classroom. These funding weights, when applied to the basic per pupil allotment, generate funds for special education services. Historically, higher funding weights have been provided for more restrictive instructional settings. For example, the resource room arrangement generated fewer dollars than did the self-contained severe setting. Significant changes in funding weights took effect in the 1994-95 school year. Most notably, distinctions between weights for the two types of self-contained classrooms, severe and mild/moderate, were eliminated, and the mainstream arrangement increased from 0.25 to 1.1. In addition, the state school funding weight fell by nearly half, from 5.0 to 2.8, as the funding weight for resource room increased from 2.7 to 3.0. These changes in funding weights were designed to encourage changing placements from more to less restrictive instructional settings.

## DISTRICT BUDGETED FUNDS

Comparing district budgeted operating expenditures for school year 1992-93 revealed that the regular education program accounted for 65.1 percent of the budget, followed by special education which accounted for 13.0 percent. From 1990 to 1993, district budgeted special education expenditures increased slightly, while the regular education expenditures decreased slightly. These district reported expenditures do not reflect the total resources available for public education in Texas since the figures do not include the value of other services or materials provided from other sources.

## SUMMARY

The task force's review of this background information, combined with reading materials, discussions, classroom visits, and expert speakers, identified several important issues. The background information indicated that males and African Americans were over-represented in current special education programs. The achievement gap between students with and without disabilities increased as students progressed through school. Coupled with the achievement gap are higher retention rates for students with disabilities, indicating lack of academic success. Life after leaving the public schools, in terms of employment, further education, or leisure activities, for students with disabilities has not reached a level of participation comparable to students without disabilities. Clearly, providing students with disabilities an equitable and excellent education presents a challenge for schools.

In response to rising public expectations for higher levels of achievement and acquisition of more complex skills by all students, schools have begun the process of restructuring their organization, curricula, instruction, assessment, staff development, and community relationships. The policies previously adopted by the State Board of Education for early childhood/elementary, middle, and high school education specifically call for widespread restructuring of schools. The restructuring that occurs in response to those policies, as well as the *Policy Statement on the Education of Students with Disabilities* (1994) must incorporate a commitment to improve services for students with disabilities.

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## MISSION AND PHILOSOPHY

The State Board of Education Task Force on Students with Disabilities was charged with examining the current state of education for students with disabilities and developing policy and recommendations for implementation to the State Board of Education. This initiative is the fourth in a series addressing the education of Texas students. Previously adopted policies for early childhood/elementary, middle grade, and high school education lay the foundation for future reform, opening the door to local innovation within a broad framework defining quality education for all students. Since the state has specific responsibilities with regard to the education of students with disabilities, the State Board of Education established this task force to develop a policy that further defines and integrates those policies, recognizing that the previously adopted policies are relevant to students with disabilities as valued members of those student bodies.

There are five fundamental concepts that underlie the policy: individualization, collaboration, communication, integration, and transformation. Change should be undertaken when it serves to make these concepts a reality in our schools and classrooms.

“Education reform movements in the country, and there have been many, typically have not focused on public responsibility for educating all students.”

—Moats & Lyon. *Learning Disabilities in the U.S.: Advocacy, Science, & the Future of the Field.*

## INDIVIDUALIZATION

As part of its work, the task force traveled throughout the state, visiting schools and listening to the public. Members saw a variety of students with a variety of needs and observed schools creating a variety of responses to those needs. These responses acknowledged the unique nature of each student, as well as the unique nature of each school and community. Such individualization, in the view of the task force, is equally valuable to students with or without disabilities. In addition, the task force developed the position that the educational system should center on the student, assume each student is gifted with a unique combination of abilities, and devote sufficient resources to address areas of educational need for all students.

Building upon the policy for high school education which calls for individual education plans for every student, this task force extends that recommendation to all students with disabilities at all grade levels. Within this context, the task force came to value the systemic flexibility needed to foster creative responses necessary to help each student realize full academic, intellectual, linguistic, physical, emotional, and social potential.

Through the policy development process, many task force members came to believe in the need for systemic reform, reflecting the particular strengths of schools and communities across the state, that would enable educators to produce better outcomes for all students, including those with disabilities. In such a system, accustomed roles would be altered, and all educators, not only special educators, would accept the education of students with disabilities as an inherent responsibility. Collaboration and teamwork will be called for: collaboration among teachers; collaboration among teachers and administrators; collaboration among school personnel and other service providers; collaboration among school personnel and parents; collaboration among teachers and students; and collaboration among students themselves. Teachers in such a system will view themselves not as specialists, but as generalists, working across disciplines to diagnose and solve student learning problems. While there will still be a need for highly trained specialists in particular disability areas, special educators will fill a unique role, providing professional expertise to general educators.

"Nearly all advocates for students with disabilities want effective instruction in academic and social skills, appropriate education in the least restrictive environment, public education that accommodates students with special problems, labels that carry the least possible social stigma, parental participation in decisions to provide special services, and collaboration among all service providers."

—Kauffman, J. M. *How We Might Achieve the Radical Reform of Special Education.*

## COMMUNICATION

The task force envisions a system where teamwork is the norm and open communication is a valued feature. Everyone involved in the education of students would talk and listen simply as individuals interested in the best education possible for all students, without needing to filter what is said or heard through preconceived perceptions of the various roles represented. Benefitting students would take precedence over protecting what exists in terms of organizational structure or educators' roles. The task force made a commitment to value the voice of each participant in the policy development process, whether it was the voice of a classroom teacher, a student, a paraprofessional, a parent, a researcher, or a special educator. That same commitment must be made by all individuals responsible for improving the education of students as they discuss reforms over the coming months and years in every school. The reform process will be long, complex, and

challenging for all involved. However, the rewards, in terms of students better served within their classrooms, schools, and communities, becoming more productive and happier in their daily living, will justify the effort.

## INTEGRATION

Over the policy development process, the task force encountered individuals and groups advocating various positions regarding the inclusion movement. The task force recognized that the educational system must be restructured if more students, decided on a student-by-student basis and appropriately supported, are to receive their education in regular education classrooms in their neighborhood schools. This must be balanced by the preservation of other options for students with specific disability needs. The task force acknowledges that there will always be a need to provide special services to some students, but also believes the system should not unnecessarily limit who may provide quali-

## SCHOOL RESTRUCTURING

Restructuring schools has become a fashionable term in educational reform circles. What is meant by the term "restructuring?" How will restructured schools produce better outcomes for our students?

Restructured schools is a term that can be applied to many different types of schools. Their one common factor, however, is the undertaking of comprehensive change. Restructuring schools does not mean simply modifying the curriculum or revising the schedule, although these changes may well be a part of restructured schools. School restructuring means a comprehensive program of change designed to fundamentally transform the way the school operates in order to produce better outcomes for its students.

Classrooms or schedules or curriculum are not changed in isolation. Rather, school restructuring is a process of systematically evaluating the overall structure, and making meaningful changes as part of a coherent plan designed to improve achievement. Restructuring requires an evaluation of the school as an organization, identifying key stakeholders and determining the effectiveness of current organizational patterns. Restructuring provides a framework by which changes can be made throughout the system in a comprehensive and congruous fashion.

Such a comprehensive program may involve utilizing different staffing patterns, organizing students and teachers into smaller "schools within a school," integrating curricular content into thematic instructional units that blur traditional subject content areas, implementing an effective system of school-based decision making, changing the daily or yearly school calendar, and involving parents and community members and agencies more directly in the day-to-day life of the school.

Restructuring requires the ability to take risks. It is not enough to give administrators and teachers greater flexibility in the utilization of resources and ask them to develop unique ways of meeting specified goals and outcomes without giving them room to make mistakes and learn from them. The goal must be continuous improvement overall, through a continuous process of evaluation and goal setting.

Restructured schools may or may not have inclusion programs. Restructured schools that do wish to include more students with disabilities in the entire life of the school will look for ways in which the organizational structure of the school could be changed to support their successful participation.

ty instruction or where it may take place. Likewise, when students need intense support or instruction or have specific needs related to their disability, they must have access to an appropriate setting and must be served by educators with disability-specific knowledge and skill. Regardless of where the education of students with disabilities takes place, it must be remembered that the ultimate goal of service delivery is the integration and participation of students with disabilities in the full regular educational program when it meets the identified needs of each student.

## TRANSFORMATION

The task force strongly believes that the time for making a unified system of service delivery a reality in the state of Texas is now. The state should not undertake reform agendas that do not fully incorporate services to students with disabilities. Nor will reforms gained in the education of students with disabilities survive in the absence of general education reform. As reform focuses on educating an increasingly diverse student body, both special education and regular education have expertise to contribute toward that goal.

Systemic reform, reform involving all levels and participants in the educational system, becomes more and more critical as changes in our society increase. Such reform is absolutely necessary, and further, now is the time to create a system engineered to ensure success for all students and for all those called to educate them.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Establish educational goals, based on high expectations, to enable students with disabilities to achieve their fullest potential in intellectual, academic, linguistic, social, emotional, and physical growth and development.

- Develop individual plans for students with disabilities driven by meaningful skills and knowledge and reflective of each student's individual needs and highest potential.
- Design and deliver services based on the needs of the student, not on the availability of services.
- Ensure sufficient funds to serve students with disabilities in learning environments where they are most likely to achieve their full educational potential as determined by their individual plans. Seek additional funds, if necessary, to provide the services needed.
- Support amendments to state and federal legislation that remove requirements and incentives for labeling students according to disability in order to secure necessary funding for services, but preserve sufficient funding to provide services to students with highly specialized needs.
- Support legislation that provides students with disabilities access to appropriate curricula and learning environments needed to successfully complete their individual plans.
- Review and amend rules which may hinder school districts and campuses in developing appropriate heterogeneous learning environments to meet the needs of most students with disabilities within the educational mainstream.
- Ensure that students receive special education services on the basis of disability, not culture, race, or gender.
- Promote involvement in the total school program by providing timely information to students and parents about the range of school-wide activities, programs, and supports available to all students.

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# ASSESSMENT, CURRICULUM, AND INSTRUCTION

All parents expect the same result from the education system for their children — preparation for a productive life. The requirements for active participation in all aspects of society now and into the twenty-first century become more and more demanding: problem-solving skills instead of simple recall of isolated facts, self-management skills instead of step-by-step supervision in the workplace, and the ability to interface successfully with emerging technology. The task force foresees these new demands addressed through a higher quality curriculum, more effective instruction, and more sensitive assessment for all students, including those with disabilities. The fundamental responsibility of the schools is to provide the learning opportunities for each student to progress as far as possible toward independence, civic and economic self-responsibility, and life-long learning.

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## INITIAL ASSESSMENT

Most students begin school in the regular education program. If they begin to encounter learning problems, they are referred for an initial assessment to determine their eligibility for special education services. Task force members heard from teachers that the early identification of students needing special education services was crucial to their long-term success. Early identification paves the way for early, individualized interventions.

The task force also advocates the use of pre-referral strategies, such as providing a support team to the regular education teacher. Pre-referral strategies assist teachers to meet the needs of students in the regular classroom, providing them the opportunity to be successful without requiring a disability label. As a consequence, the number of students referred for assessment is reduced. Pre-referral strategies may not be appropriate for students with sensory impairments,

### **INITIAL ASSESSMENT AT KOOKEN EDUCATION CENTER**

Early intervention is of critical importance in addressing the needs of students with disabilities. The initial assessment of a student with a potential disability lays the foundation for the development of the IEP and determines the course of service that will follow. At Kookan Education Center, an early childhood center in the Arlington Independent School District, initial assessment is given a high priority.

At Kookan, children between the ages of three and five who qualify for their programs on the basis of disability, socioeconomic status, or limited English

proficiency are evaluated by a diagnostic team. The diagnostic team may include the special education teacher, specially trained therapists such as speech or physical therapists, a bilingual teacher, and an age-level teacher. During the initial assessment, the children are encouraged to participate in a series of games and songs designed to provide the diagnostic team with critical information concerning the child's developmental level and current capabilities in a variety of areas. Parents take part in the songs and games that make up the initial assessment to provide a greater sense of security for the child. Once the assessment is completed, the diagnostic team makes joint recommendations which help determine the service arrangement the child will have.

however. The nature of their disability may require immediate intervention from skilled professionals, and in many cases, coordinated services from medical personnel.

### **CURRICULUM THAT SUPPORTS STUDENT LEARNING**

The formal curriculum offered students defines the knowledge and skills expected of them by society. In essence, the curriculum defines what students are supposed to know and be able to do as a result of attending school. Texas statute requires that each school district offer its students a well-balanced curriculum, and the task force recognizes that students with disabilities must have access to the same high quality curriculum offered their peers without disabilities.

The task force heard that the curriculum currently offered in many special education programs is not challenging to students and certainly is not preparing them to enter post-secondary school or secure employment. Too often, expectations for performance are low initially, and, when students fail to progress, expectations are lowered further and formally through revisions to the individual education plan. Parents reported that their information and ideas regarding their student's educational program content are not highly valued. In some cases, individuals stated that the labeling process serves to restrict the curriculum

options offered students with disabilities. Over time, as students with disabilities in special education classes fall further and further behind their peers in regular classes, reintegration into the mainstream curriculum becomes more and more elusive. Regular education teachers said they are often uninformed about the goals contained in the students' individual education plans and, therefore, do not address them when students are mainstreamed. These teachers also seek more input into the design process for individual education plans. More comprehensive and consistent communication about the educational programs of students with disabilities was a common request heard by the task force.

In response to these concerns, the task force took the position that most students will receive the same curriculum in order to be prepared for a successful life after school. Students with disabilities will require access to the full curriculum offered to other students, as well as curriculum specific to their disability needs. Access to the full curriculum means that calls to abolish academic tracking will apply equally to students with disabilities and that the scope of the curriculum must be broad enough to address the disability-specific needs of each student. For example, a student with a visual impairment may need instruction in Braille reading or orientation and mobility, in addition to academic content required for graduation.

#### CONTENT STANDARDS AND STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

The national standards movement seeks to define what students are to know and be able to do in certain content areas and to set higher performance expectations for all students. How to incorporate students with disabilities into the same framework of content standards as other students remains a continuing challenge. The National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) has recommended that one set of content standards be identified and that the set apply to all students. The goal is to provide direction for all students with regard to skills and knowledge important for life as adults. As standards are translated into instructional objectives, the NCEO suggests that adjustments then

be made in learning experiences, levels of special education service, and instructional accommodations for students with disabilities. The differentiation for students would occur, then, when curricular choices are being made. For individual students, regardless of disability status, the framework of the content standards would remain the same while the depth and breadth of instruction within those standards would vary as determined in the IEP. Any variations made must be agreed to by the student's parents. The intent is to provide instructional variations based not upon categorical labels but upon individual needs.

—*"Students with Disabilities and Educational Standards: Recommendations for Policy and Practice."* National Center for Educational Outcomes.

Intellectual, academic, linguistic, social, emotional, and physical growth are goals for all students. Depending upon the individual needs of students with disabilities, some curriculum areas assume more importance in reaching these goals and others may be added. Skills that students without disabilities learn vicariously, informally, and naturally may be the focus of formal instruction for a student with disabilities. For example, most students learn in their homes to clean, organize, and maintain their living space. To achieve that same goal, some students with communication challenges, however, will need instruction by teachers able to communicate through each student's preferred method and knowledgeable of the independent living curriculum. Many parents of students with disabilities place high value on the development of social and independent living skills not commonly addressed or emphasized in the general curriculum. Likewise, basic communication and self-advocacy skills are not currently addressed in the curriculum for students without disabilities, but must continue to be an important component of the curriculum for students with disabilities.

"For many students with disabilities the issue of what they are taught gets lost in decisions about where they are taught. Students with disabilities are entitled to have access to the district curriculum, but the curriculum cannot be so narrowly defined that it creates 'casualties' who become the referrals to special education."

—*Issues & Options in Restructuring Schools and Special Education Programs.*

## LEARNING SOCIAL AND BEHAVIORAL SKILLS

In some cases, what appears to be a restrictive environment can actually facilitate greater integration at a later point in a student's educational career. In a self-contained behavior adjustment class (BAC) that serves six students, the program has been designed to teach students social and behavioral skills needed to function more successfully in the regular classroom. For example, when the task force visited, the classroom had been arranged so that the students do not become accustomed to working in isolation but, instead, learn to adapt their behavior in an environment more similar to the regular classroom.

The students must work through a highly structured four-level point system designed to help them learn and sustain new behaviors. The time it takes students to work through the system varies greatly but can take one to two years. According to the teacher, students often regress, and must work their way through the system completely before they are ready for reintegration into the regular program. When this teacher was asked where these students might be if they did not have this self-contained BAC, she responded that most of them would be in residential treatment centers because their behavior was such that it could not be modified in the regular classroom prior to their placement in the BAC.

Returning students to the regular classroom is done in

a careful and systematic format, with students joining the regular classroom for first one subject, gradually adding subjects as they are able to handle the more distracting environment. The special education teacher and regular education teacher work together to facilitate the transition. The classroom teacher uses the same system of behavior reinforcement as the special education teacher, and works with the special education teacher to ensure the student is keeping pace with the material covered in the classroom. Students can remove themselves from the regular classroom and return to the BAC at any time they are afraid they may lose control. This gives them the opportunity to monitor their own behavior so they can continue to remain in the regular classroom without regressing or losing control in such a way that they might be removed from the regular classroom for an extended period of time.

As many of the special educators working with students with emotional disturbances pointed out, these students have already been part of the regular classroom, and simply did not have the skills to handle the many distractions and numerous interpersonal relationships. However, reintegration into a regular classroom is clearly the major focus of the program in this BAC. Through a more structured environment designed to teach them these critical social and behavioral skills, they can become full participants in the regular classroom.

## INSTRUCTION TO ADDRESS DIVERSE NEEDS

Effective instruction recognizes the diverse interests, needs, and abilities of students and accommodates all learners. Since a primary goal of education is preparing students for independence, instructional activities prepare students to work cooperatively and lead them to progressively higher levels of self-direction. Over the course of their school career, students assume more responsibility for their own learning. Teachers design instruction which not only meets the current needs of students with disabilities, but moves them toward their goals of self-direction and independence.

The task force observed a variety of classes in schools across the state. Among them were self-contained special education classrooms for students with severe and

profound disabilities; Regional Day School Programs for the Deaf; adaptive behavior classes; and regular education classes containing students with disabilities such as mental retardation or developmental disabilities, visual or hearing impairments, learning disabilities, and emotional disturbances. The task force was very impressed with classes where all students were engaged in exciting and challenging learning activities. All students were not working on the content in the same way: some used computers, others engaged in individual writing activities, and still others worked in pairs to discuss assignments. To the task force members, most students with disabilities were indistinguishable from students without disabilities in these classes. In several of these classes, teachers with regular and specialized training worked as members of cross-disciplinary academic teams or as co-teachers to provide appropriate instructional activities for all

## ACCOMMODATIONS AND MODIFICATIONS

The task force recommends that all teachers be better prepared to make instructional accommodations and modifications for all students. For students with disabilities, instructional accommodations and modifications are developed individually to meet the student's specific needs through the IEP. Accommodations and modifications which are commonly used include:

- allowing extended time to complete assignments
- reformatting tests to shorten segments
- allowing a calculator for math if testing higher level objectives is the objective
- using oral testing
- using manipulatives, models, maps, charts, and other concrete representations
- explaining directions orally
- using peer tutors
- providing individual instruction
- providing note taking assistance
- providing copies of teacher notes
- matching seating arrangements to needs and activities
- reducing number of paper/pencil tasks

- providing previews, outlines, summaries, or reviews
- using multisensory instruction
- accepting alternative assignments
- highlighting important information in textbooks, on the chalkboard, computer file, or overhead projector.
- allowing students to retake tests
- giving one direction at a time
- using shortened assignments or breaking assignments into smaller steps
- allowing use of tape recorder for taking notes and giving verbal responses to assignments and tests
- using discipline management contracts
- using specialized equipment
- using small group instruction
- using assignment sheets or notebooks
- allowing computer use for writing tasks
- using alternative materials and textbooks
- allowing frequent, brief breaks
- allowing cooling off periods

—Compiled from documents provided to the task force from Richardson Independent School District and All Children Can Learn Together: Suggestions for Least Restrictive Environment, TEA.

students. In classes that work for students with disabilities, individualization of instruction has become a goal for all students, not just students with disabilities.

A safe environment is a necessary condition for learning for all students. In addition, student learning is enhanced by a sense of belonging to the classroom group. The task force encountered excellent examples of classrooms providing both conditions for all students. For students who are deaf, their sense of belonging to a unique cultural group was enhanced in classrooms which afforded them the opportunity to interact with peers and teachers in their preferred mode of communication. Where students with disabilities were transitioning from special education to regular education classrooms, the most successful experiences were preceded by careful planning and preparation. Successful programs anticipated the need for social support systems for students with disabilities, giving it careful attention in the planning process. As a result, regular education students and teachers welcomed and accepted students with disabilities as valued members of the class. In most cases, the

groundwork had been laid in advance through teacher-led activities such as frank and open classroom discussions about disabilities and feelings or volunteer programs connecting peers for social and other support activities. The task force strongly recommends that sufficient time be provided for planning for supportive classroom environments.

Technology is changing the face of classroom instruction as new technologies open doors for all students. In some cases, learning experiences once considered beyond possibility become commonplace, and adaptive technologies expand learning experiences for increasing numbers of students with disabilities. Given the positive nature of most changes, the task force encountered some situations where teachers and students would benefit from additional training and support. For example, students with hearing impairments experienced frustration in a middle school science class. During a portion of the class when students viewed a laser disk, students who were deaf had to choose between watching the laser disk or the interpreter. When visiting another program, it

## INTEGRATING STUDENTS WITH SEVERE DISABILITIES INTO THE SCHOOL

Many students with disabilities share the same general appearance and behavior patterns as their nondisabled peers and, on that basis, blend into classrooms and campuses without anyone taking note of their disability. This is not usually the case for students with certain severe disabilities. Overcoming the discomfort and fear felt by both the disabled and nondisabled is necessary if all students are to be more successful academically and socially. Careful preparation and clear communication lay a foundation for successfully integrating students with severe disabilities into curricular and extracurricular activities. Teachers and administrators can:

- Place special education classrooms throughout the school to facilitate interaction.
- Encourage any suitable form of social interaction, including nonverbal forms.
- Teach vocabulary which facilitates social interactions, such as vocabulary for leisure activities, weather conditions, health comments, and social amenities.
- Model for the students with disabilities appropriate language and social skills for interacting with students without disabilities.
- Once students are able to imitate or model someone else, teach students to initiate communication.
- Teach students to interact with other students as well as adults.
- Integrate natural consequences of socially inappropriate behavior into the student's program:

that is, let students' responses help correct inappropriate behavior.

- Use cooperative activities (that is, give the group a common goal and encourage everyone to work together to reach the goal), rather than competitive or individual activities, to promote positive interactions.
- Use "peer buddy" systems in which students without disabilities volunteer to eat lunch with or act as companions during recreation/leisure activities with "special" friends.

Students without disabilities also require information and skills in order to interact successfully with students with severe disabilities.

- Provide information about students with severe disabilities to reduce fear, anxiety, and general apprehension about interactions.
- Teach about disabilities and other differences among people.
- Tell older students (age 12+) that the student they will be meeting is disabled; they will be more likely to interact positively.
- Give positive reinforcement to individuals who positively interact with students with disabilities.
- Make interactions with students with disabilities a positive behavior to be emulated by other students. For example, safety patrol members can help students in wheelchairs from the bus to the classroom or student council representatives can eat lunch with a "buddy" with severe disabilities.

—Compiled from *All Children Can Learn Together: Suggestions for the Least Restrictive Environment*. TEA.

### **SUPPORTIVE PEER RELATIONSHIPS**

At the beginning of the 1992-93 school year, J. J. Pearce High School in Richardson Independent School District implemented a Supportive Peer Relationships Course which prepares students without disabilities to serve as peer tutors and advocates for students with disabilities. The course also promotes socialization among peers who are disabled and nondisabled. Peer supporters also set examples for other high school students as they model respect and consideration for students with disabilities. Peer supporters may provide instruction to students with disabilities in the classroom or in the community. As students with disabilities attend the Study Center for the study skills class, their peer supporters apply the lessons they have learned through the Supportive Peer Relationships Course.

That the impact of the Supportive Peer Relationships Course is significant can be seen clearly in this excerpt written by one of the peer supporters:

"I have to say that when I first walked into your class I felt uncomfortable. I had never been around kids 'with disabilities.' I really wanted to be in your class, but I was also scared. But my feelings changed, starting with my first day of school. Being around...really changed my misconceptions—misconceptions that I didn't even know I had. My attitude changed as I got to know them better. When I saw my other friends at school look at me curiously when I stopped to talk to...in the hall, I realized that what had made me feel uncomfortable before was the distance between people with challenges and 'normal' kids. It was almost as if I thought I wouldn't have anything to talk about with kids who were perceived to be 'different.' I learned that everyone is a person before anything else...."

was noted that students with visual impairments had difficulty with some computer-based instructional programs due to their visual nature. Difficulties such as these can certainly be overcome, and this discussion should not be taken as justification for backing away from the increased use of instructional technology. Rather, the issue is preparing teachers to select, adapt, and use technologies appropriately for all students. The task force strongly supports the appropriate and innovative uses of technology to support the educational programs of all students, and advocates for increased availability and use of adaptive technology to meet the educational needs of students with disabilities.

Making transitions from special education classes to regular education classes requires preparation for both teachers and students. Teachers who are confident in their ability to serve their students are more effective. Regular education teachers consistently stated that they would be more successful individualizing instruction if they received additional training. They also expressed concern that other students in the classroom might receive less teacher attention than needed to ensure their progress. Students also need preparation for making the transition to regular education classes. Self-contained classes may accommodate student behaviors that are not commonly allowed in regular edu-

cation classes; in addition, students must adjust to less direct teacher instruction. The task force observed successful transitions where peers volunteered to support students with disabilities through friendship circles or took a formal class to learn how to work with peers who were disabled. The task force learned of teacher teams who worked systematically to prepare students for all aspects of the transition, helping them to meet academic, behavioral, and self-management expectations. The change to the regular classroom was not overwhelming, and students could be successful immediately. Where the reintegration process was not fully understood and supported by students and teachers, problems occurred. Because we must ensure successful learning experiences for all students, both disabled and nondisabled, the task force supports systematic attention to the transition process for teachers and students.

### **ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING**

Within this era of reform, the assessment of learning has assumed a critical role. The educational system in Texas is held accountable for results in large measure on the basis of standardized test results. While 90 percent of Texas students participate in the Texas Assess-

ment of Academic Skills (TAAS), approximately 50 percent of the students who receive special education services, or 5 percent of the total student population, are exempted through the ARD process. Currently, the results of special education students who do participate in TAAS are excluded from the state accountability system.

Many task force members were very concerned about the appropriateness of the TAAS for some students with disabilities. While most task force members recognized a need to have comprehensive, accurate measurement of student growth and progress, they were also concerned that inappropriate assessment placed students under unacceptable pressures and produced meaningless results. Because of this concern, the task force strongly encourages the development of alternative assessments such as portfolio or performance assessment. When determined by the ARD committee, these alternative assessments would be used to provide information about a student's growth and progress toward the goals and objectives contained in the individual plan.

The task force recommends the incorporation of achievement results gained through individually appropriate assessments for students with disabilities into the state accountability system. Doing so will increase the likelihood that they will be offered the same curricular options as other students.

The task force also discussed the topic of accommodations for students with disabilities in the assessment process. As more students with disabilities are expected to complete the same curriculum as other students, more will be expected to participate in the state assessment system. Teachers and administrators may be unaware of the range of modifications for students with disabilities which may be allowed without violating the integrity of the assessment. In addition to the appropriate use of modifications to state assessments, the task force supports the use of a variety of classroom assessment activities. These should be integrated naturally into classroom instruction as a component of daily activities. Accommodations for students with disabilities would also be appropriate in this context.

#### ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENTS

Within the last decade, many assessment programs have changed from "low" stakes to "high" stakes for both individuals and schools. Instead of sharing results primarily with parents and teachers and using those results for individual planning and monitoring, assessment results are increasingly used in highly publicized state and national accountability systems. In addition, assessment results often determine who receives a diploma. Recent developments in assessment include moving beyond paper and pencil tests to using alternative assessments, such as portfolios and demonstrations.

Responding to the needs of students with disabilities within this high stakes assessment environment presents significant challenges. While some states allow exemption for students with disabilities from the state-mandated assessment program, others are seeking ways to hold educators accountable for student progress through alternative assessments.

Kentucky has undertaken a restructuring of its educational system, including the identification of learning goals for all students, new curriculum frameworks,

and a redesigned assessment system for all students. Because all students will be included in the new state accountability system, the state has developed a process where ARD committees decide the appropriate assessment for each student with disabilities. Each ARD committee chooses between three options: including the student in the assessment process required of all students; modifying the assessment process in a manner consistent with the instructional strategies specified in the student's IEP or 504 plan, including use of assistive technology; or allowing the student to participate in a structured alternative portfolio assessment. The alternate portfolio contains a table of contents, a letter from the student to the reviewer describing the portfolio, seven to ten examples of student responses demonstrating breadth of content and tasks appropriate to that student, a weekly schedule describing activities and choices for the student, a resume of job experiences, a sample of the student's present mode of communication, and a letter from a family member or caregiver validating the contents of the portfolio. The alternative portfolio assessment ensures that students with significant challenges will be given opportunities to demonstrate their growth in appropriate ways and that they are represented in the state's accountability system as it becomes operational.

## TAAS MODIFICATIONS

The task force heard many concerns about the effects of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) upon students, especially students with disabilities. Although students are tested in several grades, they must pass the 10th grade TAAS in order to receive a diploma. For students receiving special education services, the ARD committee may exempt students from taking the TAAS through the IEP. For students with disabilities who are not exempted from the TAAS, one concern raised was that regular classroom teachers were not aware of, and therefore not using, the allowable modifications which could be made for students with disabilities.

According to the district and campus *TAAS Coordinator Manual* for Summer 1994, certain test administration procedures may be used if they do not cause test results to be invalid. The decision to use a modification is made on an individual basis and should consider the needs of the student with disabilities and whether the student routinely receives the modification during classroom instruction.

- Instructions given orally before or after the test may be signed to a student with hearing impairments or translated into the native language of a student with limited English proficiency.
- Students may place a colored transparency over the test, or they may use a place marker with the test and answer document.
- Students may receive individual administration of the test and may read aloud as they work in that setting.
- The student may use a Braille version of the test.
- Students may respond orally to test items, mark responses in the test booklet, or type responses if

they have a disabling condition that interferes with their ability to record machine readable responses. If a student must dictate a composition, the student must spell all words and indicate all capital letters and punctuation marks. Afterward, the student must be allowed to read over the composition and indicate where he or she would like to make corrections. The test administrator must record these responses verbatim on a standard answer document.

- The student may type the TAAS written composition on a typewriter or on a computer but may not use the computer's "spellcheck" feature or save the document. The composition must be transcribed onto a regular answer document for scoring.

For the mathematics test, the test questions and answer choices may be read aloud for students identified as having dyslexia or a related disorder and who regularly receive this modification in the classroom. This modification is available only for the mathematics section of the test. The decision for oral administration of the TAAS mathematics test to students receiving special education should be made by the student's ARD committee. The decision for students not in special education rests with the committee required by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 to make placement decisions.

Some modifications are not allowed: the student may not receive any special reading assistance on the reading or writing test; the student may not use a calculator or a slide rule; and the student may not use English-language or foreign-language reference materials.

—*TAAS Coordinator Manual, Summer 1994*

To integrate students with disabilities into the accountability system will require that valid and reliable assessments for curriculum areas of particular importance to some students with disabilities, and not currently evaluated, must be selected or developed. For example, a student's progress in learning Braille reading is not currently assessed in a way which can be integrated into the state accountability system. However, since learning to read Braille is an individual goal for a student with a visual impairment, then the

school's success in teaching the student should be considered when determining the school's effectiveness. Because learning in some domains specified in the individual plan, such as the social domain, is not measured well by multiple choice tests, the task force supports the use of different assessment forms such as portfolios or observations of natural interactions among students. Again, the task force recommends that these results be considered in the overall determination of school and program effectiveness.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Review the state assessment system and make recommendations regarding appropriate techniques for all students which will accommodate students with disabilities, accurately evaluating their growth and achievement. Develop alternative assessments to Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) within the individual plan and ensure that modifications and accommodations are consistent with classroom adjustments.
- Adopt clearly defined goals within a well-balanced curriculum that address the general and disability-specific needs of students to prepare them for maximum participation in their communities.
- Support innovative responses in districts and campuses to the learning needs of students with disabilities through increased discretionary funding.
- Inform teachers of the range of allowable modifications related to the TAAS for students with disabilities. Ensure that teachers make appropriate modifications in the testing situation consistent with those made in classroom instruction.
- Design modifications in curriculum, instruction, and assessment so that students will move toward increasing levels of independence.
- Modify or select classroom assessments appropriate to individual plans to gain more accurate measurement of student progress and the success of classroom instruction.
- Educate students with disabilities about their rights and responsibilities so that, over the course of their educational program, they can assume increasing responsibility for making choices among their options.
- Educate parents regarding their rights and responsibilities so that they will be informed members of teams that develop the individual plans for students with disabilities. Encourage and support parental involvement throughout this process.
- Create learning opportunities which encourage meaningful interactions between students with disabilities and their peers with and without disabilities.
- Prepare students with disabilities for competitive jobs available within their local communities.
- Provide realistic, substantive career planning so that students with disabilities leave public schools with marketable skills or skill levels sufficient for post-secondary training opportunities.
- Provide opportunities for students to learn communication systems that will enable them to communicate with students who are disabled.
- Involve regular education teachers in the development and assessment of individual plans.
- Recognize that students with auditory and visual impairments have specific needs for certain curricula which can be delivered through an array of environments and that they may benefit from social and academic interactions with other students with similar disabilities.

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## PROFESSIONAL GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

Creating a restructured, student-centered educational system requires simultaneous change at all levels. Reforms at the system level have no effect if teachers do not adopt and support them; likewise, teachers may be willing and eager to make changes in classroom practice but may be hampered by system regulations. Implementing a restructured system demands new goals, attitudes, commitments, roles, skills, and knowledge for educators to serve all students more effectively and to move more services for students with disabilities into the education mainstream. Effective preservice and inservice education programs for school staff must align with and support the restructured system.

Many teachers feel prepared to teach certain disciplines or work with students at certain developmental levels. Nonetheless, educators consistently expressed concerns about the lack of congruence between training and development programs and the realities of today's classrooms.

As a consequence, the task force recommends significant changes in preservice and inservice preparation programs for both teachers and administrators.

"No structural change is likely to make much difference unless it improves the teacher student interactions that constitute academic instruction and behavior management....Put another way, schools will be successful in nurturing the intellectual, social, and moral development of children only to the extent that they also nurture such development of teachers."

—Kauffman, J. M. *How We Might Achieve the Radical Reform of Special Education.*

## INITIAL TEACHER CERTIFICATION

The task force heard that most teachers are not prepared sufficiently by their initial preparation programs to meet the needs of individual students, especially those with more significant or disability-specific needs. Many teachers are not aware of the basic characteristics of various disability conditions and the array of modifications which may address these needs. Also, many teachers are unfamiliar with the variety of methods that can be used in the classroom to assess a student's learning.

Teachers may assume new roles such as working as part of an instructional team or supervising the work of a paraprofessional supporting students with disabilities, roles for which they may feel unprepared. The task force spoke with one special education teacher who is part of an academic team containing, in addition to herself, one mathematics, one English, one science, and one social studies teacher. As the special education teacher circulates through the four classrooms providing support for students, she relates to each teacher in a different role, depending largely on the preferences of the host teacher. In one class, she teaches lessons, alternating with the regular education teacher; in another class, she serves essentially as an aide, responding to students at their requests. This situation is not one the special education teacher had anticipated. Teaming and supervising paraprofessionals who support students with disabilities in regular educational settings are viable options for successful instructional arrangements. However, neither regular nor special education teachers are adequately trained for this role. Better preparation for all teachers to work together in new ways is essential if schools are to reach their learning goals for all students.

While the task force strongly recommends better initial preparation for all teachers to meet the individual needs of students, it faces the dilemma of setting realistic expectations given the constraints of the larger system. Current law establishes the expectation that, under most circumstances, candidates for initial certification will take no more than 18 semester hours of education courses and that the program be offered within a baccalaureate degree. Since most preservice candidates take student teaching, which usually con-

sumes six semester hours, what remains is the equivalent of four college courses. Meeting the needs of more diverse students will require both more depth and a broader scope in teacher preparation programs. New topics must be taught and more practice must be provided for regular education teachers in real classrooms to prepare them for the diversity of student characteristics that awaits. The need for better training conflicts with the restrictive scope of current law regarding initial certificate preparation programs.

## INITIAL ADMINISTRATOR CERTIFICATION

Under site-based decision making, local campus administrators assume increasing responsibility for student learning. Those new responsibilities may present a need for new knowledge: how to restructure schools, how to remove bureaucratic roadblocks to change, how to implement special education regulations within the restructuring environment, and how much flexibility resides on the campus in reality. These new demands on administrators must be addressed in the administrator preparation programs and in the certification requirements.

## EDUCATION AND SUPPORT FOR INSERVICE EDUCATORS

Regular education teachers repeatedly requested more training in order to adapt curriculum, modify instruction, and deal constructively with behavior problems. As more teachers work with all students, the need for training becomes more intense. As the complexity of student needs within the classroom increases, the need to individualize instruction can no longer be ignored. Responding to the need for individually appropriate instruction will benefit all students in the classroom and place new demands upon teachers. As professionals, teachers should be expected to be continually engaged in updating their knowledge base and skills for the benefit of all students.

Many teachers, like all human beings, fear the unknown, and when faced with additional demands to serve students with unfamiliar needs, regular education teachers experienced fear. Several teachers

## MANAGING CHANGE

Managing change is a challenge. Improving the education of students with disabilities as envisioned by the task force will require significant change in the current state of services for students with disabilities. During the visits to 35 schools and numerous classrooms and the seven public hearings where parents, educators, and advocates gave testimony, a common core of ideas and suggestions were heard frequently by the task force.

- Provide time to plan and collaborate, during both design and implementation of changes, for regular education teachers, special education teachers, other support personnel, administrators, parents, and students.
- Maintain frequent, open communication through newsletters, forums, electronic media, awareness sessions, and media campaigns in the community.
- Communicate to all staff, especially those not directly involved in the changes, that their support is critical in creating a supportive atmosphere on campus.

- Provide opportunities for teachers to discuss their concerns about changes which impact their classrooms and respond to those concerns.
- Provide clear expectations for students, as well as information about upcoming changes that affect students with and without disabilities.
- Provide high quality staff development for all school staff, as well as training for parents and students who will be affected by changes.
- Consider class size adjustments or limitations based upon the nature of the changes and the characteristics of the class.
- Develop a quick response system to provide support to teachers and students and promote the health and safety of all during emergency situations.
- Develop a climate that encourages educational innovation, experimentation, and risk-taking for teachers and students.
- Pilot changes before widespread implementation and make adjustments based upon the pilot's results.
- Allocate sufficient resources to initiate and sustain changes.
- Assess the effects of the change over time for students with and without disabilities.

speaking with the task force described the concerns that surfaced as their school staff began an inclusion program. Many feared that the education of students without disabilities would suffer by disruptions, a slower instructional pace, and a lack of attention from the teacher. Parents of students with disabilities reported that often their requests for more integration into the regular classroom met with resistance from school personnel. Regardless of their understanding of teachers' concerns, these parents remained adamant that students deserved to be welcomed into regular classrooms. They expressed strong support for more training for teachers and administrators as a necessary condition to achieve improved services integrated into the regular classroom. In programs where students with disabilities were successfully included, teachers ascribed their effectiveness to extensive staff development and sufficient planning time, both prior to and after inclusion began. To repeat these success

stories across the state, training and support for administrators, paraprofessionals, teachers, and other school staff are seen by the task force as critical requirements.

One of the fundamental changes associated with school restructuring is the emergence of a variety of staffing patterns and new roles and responsibilities for various school staff. As they traveled across the state, the task force encountered examples of these different staffing patterns, such as interdisciplinary academic teams, co-teachers, and special education consulting teachers. In addition, the task force observed administrators or special education teachers who are called upon to assume new responsibilities supporting the regular education teacher, especially during potentially critical or dangerous classroom situations. For example, on an elementary campus where students with emotional disturbances were included in regular education classes, a signal system using colored cards

#### EXEMPLARY STAFF DEVELOPMENT PRACTICE

Recognizing that significant change requires sustained and relevant staff development, the South Texas Independent School District systematically offered sessions that reflect the needs of local staff as they sought to improve services for students with disabilities. Prior to the start of the 1993-94 school year:

- Bus drivers, custodians, cafeteria workers, and bus monitors learned about students with disabilities and how to provide assistance to those students.
- All parents and students of the high school had an opportunity to attend an awareness session to overview the changes planned.
- All professional staff became more familiar with the federal Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Education of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.
- Special education teachers received training on procedures for working with medically fragile students while all professional staff attended sessions to learn about the special needs of students with disabilities and some simple skills to better relate to and understand students with disabilities.

#### As the year progressed:

- Teachers also received training in professional collaboration and strategies for serving special students.
- Non-vocational and vocational teachers met in groups to evaluate progress in serving students with disabilities and to suggest improvements.
- Special education teachers attended sessions provided by the Texas School for the Deaf in using calendars to teach organization, language development, and time concepts.
- All teachers learned about appropriate educational strategies for students with dyslexia and became more informed regarding the aids, tools, devices, and equipment used by students with disabilities.

#### Near the end of the school year:

- Vocational and non-vocational teachers met in role groups for a second time to evaluate progress in serving students with disabilities.

The task force was impressed with the nature of this staff development program which clearly responded to the needs of students, parents, and regular and special educators.

allows teachers to ask quickly for assistance and simultaneously communicate the severity of the situation by sending the cards to the central office. Teachers on that campus did not feel they would face a difficult situation without support. Educational success for students with disabilities will depend, in large part, upon strong administrative and instructional support for classroom teachers.

As new structures emerge for social service delivery, the effective teacher maintains an awareness of the resources within the community available to support their students. As schools prepare students for productive adult lives, one major responsibility is to develop and implement a transition plan. To participate in the planning process, the teachers involved must know how to interface with social service personnel.

Finally, school personnel must accept the need for continuous growth and improvement of their professional skills and knowledge. Only by actively pursuing such growth are they able to remain current with new developments in areas like instructional technology, adaptive devices, or instructional techniques which benefit their students. Effective educators do not view professional development as the remediation of weak areas but as an opportunity for expansion and enhancement of their best skills, as well as the addition of new ones. As each professional gains new skills and knowledge, the capacity to respond to local needs is enhanced, especially when that professional shares those new skills with peers. The task force strongly advocates for improved and extensive staff development for all educational personnel.

## **NATIONAL BOARD FOR PROFESSIONAL TEACHING STANDARDS**

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards is developing a system of national certificates to recognize highly accomplished teachers within their areas of expertise. The national certificates, based upon high and rigorous standards of practice, are intended by the board to be an avenue for revolutionizing the teaching profession. As a way of communicating its vision of excellence, the board has established five core propositions which support the standards of excellence for all teachers. Those five propositions are:

- Teachers are committed to students and their learning.
- Teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students.
- Teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning.
- Teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience.
- Teachers are members of learning communities.

The board intends these propositions to provide guidance for the professional development of all teachers, regardless of whether they are special or regular education teachers, as they move from novice to expert status.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Work with educator preparation programs to prepare all educators to meet many of the educational needs of students with disabilities and to develop an accepting and supportive climate for students with disabilities within their classrooms.
- Allocate sufficient time within the school day for teachers to plan, discuss, and prepare before significant changes in student placements are made through the individual planning process. Increasing the number of conference and planning days within the school year or increasing the length of the school day or year may be avenues to secure additional professional planning time.
- Seek necessary funds to provide additional compensation to teachers as they take on new roles, such as team leadership, with expanded responsibilities in restructured schools.
- Allocate time for ongoing planning and consultation throughout the school year to support the delivery of services for students with disabilities.
- Improve the quality and frequency of communication between regular and special educators through such practices as teaching teams, common planning periods, access to technology, and co-teaching.
- Provide resources for comprehensive staff development opportunities for all school staff working with students with disabilities.
- Provide staff development in consensus decision making; working with parents; accessing community resources; working with professionals from community and social service agencies; working in a team environment; addressing multi-dimensional learning for each child; making modifications to curricula, instructional strategies, and assessment; using instructional technology and assistive devices in the classroom; creating peer social support systems; implementing continuous progress classrooms; managing behavior problems efficiently; and meeting legal and ethical standards.
- Expect continuous, career-long professional growth and improvement from all educators.
- Provide a variety of delivery mechanisms for staff development such as peer observations, team visits to exemplary campus programs, time within the school day dedicated to team discussion and planning, self-evaluation, or reflection on current practices.
- Increase joint staff development activities for regular and special educators while also providing staff development in the unique needs of various disability areas.
- Evaluate inservice programs for educators and hold the programs accountable for achieving desired results.

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- Develop incentives to attract more teachers to become certified in identified shortage areas related to students with disabilities.
  - Collaborate with preservice and inservice programs to educate teachers for new roles, such as team members, consulting teachers, members of transition planning teams, working with interpreters, or supervisors of instructional aides, which support educating increasing numbers of students with disabilities within the regular classroom.
  - Require the curriculum of preservice preparation programs to include knowledge and skills all educators need to work with most students with disabilities.
  - Collaborate with institutions of higher education to increase opportunities for student teaching to occur in settings where the preservice teachers learn to work with students with disabilities in a supportive environment.
  - Extend preparation programs to enable all preservice teachers to experience more classroom application of their formal instruction in meeting the needs of students with disabilities. One avenue for this extension would be an internship year to replace student teaching.
  - Assess preservice programs on the basis of the performances of their students; expect programs to improve over time; and base continued program approval on the performances of their graduates.

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## ORGANIZATION

In studies of organizational systems, researchers have repeatedly shown that the structure of the system itself can determine the behavior of those in the system to a large extent. Organizations that offer few opportunities for participation and self-actualization develop members whose attitudes and behaviors are congruent with the lack of opportunity: lack of investment, conservative or low-risk behaviors, and limited aspirations. In light of such knowledge, educational systems must be analyzed and restructured in ways that foster the full participation of all members — students, teachers, parents, support personnel, business and civic communities — ensuring the attainment of shared goals.

### A UNIFIED SYSTEM

The organizational structure of the educational system, from the state level to the classroom, significantly impacts the potential of those in the system to effectively promote the development of all students. There have been many calls for restructured schools in the educational reports of the last decade or more. It has become increasingly clear to many that the present organizational structure of schools and the educational system designed to support them does not allow sufficient flexibility to meet individual needs and promote the development of the whole child adequately. The policy statement calls for the integration of the current par-

allel systems of regular and special education into a unified system designed to provide coordinated and seamless support services to those students who require them to benefit from educational programming. Such a system would serve to foster a greater level of collaboration and teamwork among regular and special education teachers and administrators, as well as shared responsibility for student progress. A unified system would help to replace the fragmented and compartmentalized education that many students with disabilities receive with a more cohesive educational program. A unified and integrated system of education also complements the shift to site-based decision making, with its emphasis on shared responsibility and collaboration.

### A FULL ARRAY OF SERVICES AND SETTINGS

Within a unified system of education, the full array of educational services and settings would be available, allowing the flexibility required to meet the individual needs of students with disabilities. There was a strong showing of support in the public testimony for the inclusion of students with disabilities in the regular education classroom with appropriate supports. Many parents who testified in support of inclusion also supported the limitation or even elimination of the array of settings. Many other parents acknowledged that

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inclusion was a welcome addition to the array of placement options. But, these parents were equally as adamant that a full array of service and placement options need to be available to address the unique and disability-specific needs of all children.

The majority of task force members felt that the continuum of placement options must be maintained. Clearly, any one placement, whether it be the regular education classroom in the neighborhood school or a residential facility, cannot be a "one size fits all." Within the population of students with disabilities, there are significant differences in the nature of

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"Diversity among students is often described as something to be celebrated. If diversity of students is to be celebrated, then perhaps the diversity of services, programs, and environments providing appropriate education and habilitation should also prompt celebration."

— Kauffman, J.M. *How We Might Achieve the Radical Reform of Special Education.*

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the disability and in the services required to meet the particular needs of each student, needs which may change over time. The education of individual students is not served by assuming that all can be served well with any one type of service arrangement, or that one type of service arrangement will suffice throughout a student's educational career. The array of settings and services is necessary not only to meet the individual needs of students with disabilities, but to protect and promote their individual strengths, providing for op-

timum growth and development. Federal law requires that a continuum of placements be maintained, and further requires that students with disabilities be educated in the least restrictive environment (Hollis & Gallegos, 1993). The organizational structure should not create barriers to the utilization of any placement option determined to be in the best interest of the student.

## **COLLABORATION BETWEEN GENERALISTS AND SPECIALISTS**

The potential to meet the individual needs of students with disabilities is enhanced by collaboration between educators who have been trained as generalists and those educators who have received specialized training in working with students with disabilities or students with a particular type of disability. While no individual educator can meet all of the needs of all students with disabilities, shared knowledge between educators can greatly increase the capacity of the system to meet individual needs adequately. As schools restructure themselves to foster greater collaboration, the skills of generalists, who have been trained to apply knowledge in a variety of settings, will be crucial to the application of the specialized training undertaken by other educators.

## **ORGANIZATIONAL FLEXIBILITY**

Recent reform efforts have addressed the need for systemic change, coherent change throughout a system of education that would increase the capacity of schools to successfully meet the needs of all students. As the inadequacy of the current system to meet individual student needs for an increasingly diverse student population becomes more and more apparent, the restructuring of the system and schools themselves has been called for. Implementation of many of the task force recommendations can only occur as part of fundamental school restructuring.

To effectively meet the individual needs of students with disabilities, organizational flexibility is required in the areas of staffing, funding, educational setting, the instructional day and calendar, assessment, and planning time. One elementary school principal interviewed by the task force had used funding from several sources such as special education, Chapter I, and ESL funding to create and maintain a content mastery learning center for students in her school. In order to allow any students who felt they needed extra

## CONTENT MASTERY

Many schools at the elementary, middle, and high school levels have content mastery classes which students can use for additional help on material presented in the regular classroom when they need it. One of the advantages of a content mastery class is that, unlike the resource room, it is not generally considered a pull-out program. Students, perhaps with advice from their regular teacher or as specified by their IEP, decide when they need help with specific material. Many of the school personnel the task force talked with believed that these services, which were originally designed for special education students, should be available for all students. However, many administrators told the task force members that content mastery rooms could not be opened to all students due to the difficulty of tracking the use of specially designated state or federal funds.

In one elementary school, the principal had, by pooling funding and using her staff creatively, designed a content mastery room that could be utilized by all of the students in the school. This content mastery room was designed to serve primarily students with disabilities, students with limited English proficiency, and Chapter I/migrant students. Funds from these programs were used to employ a special education content mastery teacher and aides who staffed the room on a full-time basis. In addition, the principal

asked the fourth and sixth grade regular teachers to provide up to thirty minutes of time to staff the content mastery class when their students were in art. The amount of time the regular educators spent in the content mastery classroom added up to one FTE of a regular education teacher. Thus, they could serve any student who chose to come to content mastery.

As students came into the content mastery classroom, they signed in on color-coded sheets keyed to funding source so that the school could keep track of the number of students served and the contact hours for reporting the use of state and federal funds. However, the teachers and aides were free to assist any student, regardless of their program participation.

For those students whose IEPs specified content mastery, the special education teacher kept track of their schedules and coordinated their work with regular education teachers so that she could help these students stay current with the rest of the class. The regular education teachers were asked to send weekly lesson plans and any handouts or additional materials to the content mastery teacher so that she could help the students at any time they chose to come in. The content mastery teacher also conferred with the regular education teacher on a weekly basis to discuss student progress.

help to utilize the center, she assigned regular education teachers to the learning center for short periods of time when their students were engaged in other classes such as art. When students came in to use the center, they signed in on colored sheets coded by funding source in order to keep track of how many students from each program were being served. The content mastery center was a great success and while it is a testament to the principal's organizational acumen, such complicated measures should not be required in order to implement a programmatic initiative designed to increase student achievement.

In a recent report of the National Education Commission on Time and Learning (1994), the commission noted, "If experience, research, and common sense teach nothing else, they confirm the truism that people learn at different rates, and in different ways with different subjects. But we have put the cart before the horse: our schools and the people involved with

them—students, parents, teachers, administrators, and staff—are captives of clock and calendar. The boundaries of student growth are defined by schedules for bells, buses, and vacations instead of standards for student learning." By emphasizing efficiency and control and subordinating teaching to organizational structure, teaching has been reduced to a matter of rote, with little opportunity for educators to respond creatively.

Organizational capacity can only be maximized through individuals. When large numbers of individuals in the system are prevented from maximizing their capacity, the system as a whole is constrained and limited in its ability to function effectively. Devolving more control to those closest to the key functions of the organization increases the capacity of the organization to respond meaningfully to real conditions. If the mission is clear, then those closest to the ever-changing and ambiguous conditions of school and

## TEACHER EFFICACY AND LEARNING DISABILITIES

Students with learning disabilities (LD) make up the largest group of students within the special education population. Beginning with the definition of learning disabilities itself, there is much about the disability that remains ambiguous and contested today. In 1988, the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (referenced in Moats & Lyon, 1993) revised the definition to state the following: "Learning disabilities is a general term that refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical abilities. These disorders are presumed to be due to central nervous system dysfunction, and may occur across the life span." The lack of clarity in the definition and identification of learning disabilities has led to widely varying standards for identification from state to state.

Early identification and a high sense of efficacy in teachers are keys to success in school. In addition, research has shown the referral of students for special education services to be a largely subjective process. In schools where teachers believe that students can succeed without additional services, referral rates for special education are low. Teachers are likely to refer students for special education services when teachers do not believe they will be successful with those particular students, rather than on the basis of any objective characteristics of the students. Accord-

ing to Moats and Lyon of the National Institute of Health (1993), "LD in the United States appears to be a systemic problem: It is an educational category into which children are channeled when the learning-teaching interaction is no longer productive or rewarding for one or both parties." Thus, the identification of students as learning disabled may have as much to do with teachers' sense of self-efficacy as with a perceived discrepancy between ability and achievement on the part of the students. Nevertheless, of students identified as learning disabled, fully 60 percent were retained prior to their identification as LD (Lyon & Vaughn, 1994). In the opinion of Lyon and Vaughn, instruction as currently structured in the regular education classroom has not demonstrated that it can meet the needs of these students. When the research concerning the retention rates of LD students is considered in light of the research on special education referrals, it becomes clear that the current organization of the regular education classroom is not effective in meeting the educational needs of a significant number of its students, whether they are identified as learning disabled or not.

Clearly the research on learning disabilities and special education referrals identifies the need for systemic reform. Reforms designed to meet the needs of students with learning disabilities and increase the chances for their success will likely have similar effects for many other students in the regular education classroom.

classroom have the greatest capacity for effective problem-solving. In the case of the public school system, with its mandate to educate all students, regardless of needs, backgrounds, capabilities, interests, and support systems, the systemic constraints placed on teachers have had enormous consequences. The task force believes that organizational flexibility to allow restructuring to meet the individual needs of students with disabilities will ultimately increase the capacity of the system to meet the individual needs of all students.

School administrators and faculty repeatedly told the task force they need greater flexibility in the assignment and utilization of staff and time for joint planning and collaboration among all those involved in delivering educational services to students with disabilities. In a study by the General Accounting Office on Regu-

latory Flexibility in Schools (1994), researchers noted that, "... schools used the regulatory flexibility provided by the states to attempt to improve how classes were organized and subjects were taught. These changes included: 1) developing approaches to combining children into multigrade groups so that teachers could address the needs of children on the basis of their development rather than age; 2) restructuring the school day to allow schools to schedule longer blocks of time for class periods so that some subject areas could be covered in greater depth; 3) restructuring the school day to allow teachers more time to plan, work with other teachers, and serve on school decision making committees; 4) combining two or more subjects into thematic units, including having some units taught by teams of teachers; and 5) allowing people with special knowledge to teach classes although they do not have state-issued teaching certificates." Such

flexibility needs to become commonplace in Texas schools in order to effectively serve the individual needs of students with disabilities. Administrators need structural support for risk taking in school restructuring efforts.

Time is perhaps the most important resource in education. There is never enough time for adequate practice, much less for problem-solving and integrating new knowledge and skills. Time in schools is fragmented, and teachers' time can be devoted to a number of other duties not related to the teaching task. The task force heard that there is not enough time for adequate preparation, evaluation, or analysis of technique. Even more importantly, there is not enough time for exploring new knowledge or fostering creativity. In reality, there is little time to think during the school day. Such is the situation in a profession devoted to the transmission of knowledge and the promotion of critical thinking. The ability of teachers to identify and respond to individual student capabilities is severely limited. Time must be recognized as a critical resource, and priority must be given to organizational restructuring that provides teachers with more time to focus on their primary task: fostering the development of all students to their full potential.

#### **FUNDING TIED TO SERVICES, NOT PLACEMENT**

In a unified system, funding for students with disabilities should be determined by the array of services delivered, rather than student placement. If funding is placement neutral, educators are free to consider only educational needs in determining where a student with a disability should be educated. With better trained teachers operating in a unified system and funding tied to services instead of placement, the number of students identified as special education students may fall.

A distinction must be made in placement and personnel. Just as funding for the delivery of special education services should be placement neutral, it should not limit the delivery of services to a particular group of personnel, unless required by law. For example, special education services may be delivered by a regular education teacher to learning disabled students within the regular education classroom.

Such new funding designs should not necessarily result in reduced funds for service delivery, however. Funding for the delivery of special education services

"A funding system which allows for a unified system requires drastic revision in the way most state departments are currently allocating funds. Funding formulas must be developed that do not penalize growing districts, that support flexible staffing, and that do not reduce the total amount of funds available to meet specialized needs. A system of accountability must be developed, and a monitoring system must be in place. If a funding formula that promotes a unified system is adopted at the state level, many schools can have new opportunities to provide educational services to all students without the cumbersome evaluation and identification process which currently exists."

*—CASE Future Agenda for Special Education:  
Creating a Unified System*

should not be determined by the number of students identified as special education students, but by the services such students require in order to receive an educational benefit.

### **ADEQUATE RESOURCES**

The task force strongly supports the provision of financial, staff, technological, and other resources adequate to carry forward the policy implementation. When speaking with school personnel involved in implementing innovative programs, they spoke of the need for more resources, not fewer. Moreover, the integration of students with disabilities into the regular education program cannot be seen as a way to reduce expenditures. Rather, existing resources should be used to the fullest extent and additional funds provided, as necessary, to meet student needs.

### **ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS MEASURE EFFECTIVENESS**

The goal of state and local accountability systems is to promote the achievement of all students, including students with disabilities. The attainment of short-term goals will enable students to achieve long-term goals for successful participation in their communities. Short- and long-term goals should be focused on the development of the whole child, not narrowly focused on the area of academic development or physical development, for example. The Center for Policy Options in Special Education (1992) notes that, "... accountability for students with disabilities requires a system wide evaluation of education performance with consequences for accountable parties, in addition to the individual accountability system imbedded in the Individual Education Plan (IEP). System wide evaluations are needed to assess the impact of programming for students with disabilities. Because internal motivation is often insufficient to insure improved student outcomes, external consequences are needed to assure assessment results will

be used to bring about improved student outcomes." Without clearly defined outcomes and expected appropriate measures of school performance in the education of students with disabilities, such students may be relegated to less challenging and more narrowly focused curricula. Many parents, and some students, reported to the task force that such was the case for many students with disabilities. Clearly, the exclusion of students with disabilities from state and local accountability systems does little to increase the likelihood that the students will make gains in measures of success such as school completion and post-secondary employment rates. Accountability systems must be redesigned in such a way that they equitably incorporate appropriate measures of student progress.

### **CONTINUOUS PROCESS OF EVALUATION AND IMPROVEMENT**

Schools and their supporting systems need to engage in an ongoing evaluation of effectiveness, developing and implementing steps that will lead to improvement. Such a process of continuous evaluation will promote the organizational flexibility required to meet fully the needs of students with disabilities.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Implement organizational, staffing, and budgeting practices that support an integrated delivery of services by regular and special education.
- Remove organizational barriers which prevent students with disabilities from being educated with their nondisabled peers. Do not establish barriers that would prevent students with specific disabilities from learning in settings with other students with similar disabilities.

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- Educate all students with disabilities in the neighborhood school when the individualized planning process determines it to be the appropriate setting for the delivery of needed services. Maintain choices in educational settings for students with specific disabilities at different points in their growth and development based upon their unique and individual needs.
  - Emphasize the shared responsibility of all educators for educating students with disabilities through the campus decision making process.
  - Integrate comprehensive and appropriate information on the progress and achievement of students with disabilities into state and local accountability systems for districts and campuses.
  - Implement greater flexibility in scheduling so that teachers are able to plan and teach as colleagues to better meet the needs of all students.
  - Cooperate with other agencies to secure better post-secondary social, educational, and community services for students with disabilities.
  - Implement organizational and planning practices that ensure a smooth transition for students with disabilities when moving from one educational setting to another and from school to work.
  - Seek legislative changes to allow campus flexibility in the use of funds.
  - Adjust teacher-pupil ratios, in classes with mainstreamed students requiring significant modifications, giving priority to creating the most effective, equitable educational environment for all students.
  - Provide state of the art technology to serve the specific needs of students and to provide necessary instructional and administrative supports for teachers and other staff.

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## FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

In a system that values the voice of participants and strives to produce better outcomes for its students, community participation is crucial. The education community has increasingly come to recognize that parental involvement in the education process positively affects student achievement. Likewise, the education community has come to recognize that students, particularly students with disabilities, have needs that cannot be met by the schools alone but which, nevertheless, affect school performance. Any efforts to improve student performance must address the need for creating structures which foster family and community involvement in the local schools.

### **SCHOOLS AS CENTERS FOR COORDINATED SERVICES**

While community participation is crucial to the educational success of students with disabilities, it is perhaps the most difficult aspect to design. The Committee for Economic Development (1991), as referenced in *Family and Community Support: Coordinated Education, Health and Human Services*, noted that future efforts at educational reform must include "a comprehensive and coordinated strategy of human investment, one that redefines education as a process that begins at birth and encompasses all aspects of children's early development, including their physical, social, emotional, and cognitive growth." Meeting the

needs of all students calls for increasingly coordinated service delivery, a system of delivery that will enable each student to take full advantage of opportunities for their development. Communities and schools must work together, fashioning structures through which community agencies can maximize the effectiveness of their service delivery to students. Students with disabilities and their families may receive services from a variety of service providers and agencies. These service providers may or may not communicate concerning the progress of students with disabilities. Services may be duplicated, or services may not be delivered to all who need them. The National Governor's Association (1990) stated the need to remove preventable barriers to student development by ensuring that all students receive necessary therapeutic and social services. They noted, "Lack of availability, accessibility, and information prevents many students and their families from using the multiple systems of support they desperately need. States should encourage providers to integrate their services and create a comprehensive, client-focused network. Tailored dissemination strategies must be designed to get information on services directly to parents and students in different communities. . . . New approaches are needed to offer comprehensive services at or near schools, to redefine the role of the school as a community center, and to provide the necessary training to educators and other providers." Such new approaches

must be designed by local communities to take advantage of their unique strengths and to address their specific social service goals.

Coordinated service delivery facilitates effective use of the resources available to serve students with disabilities and their families. Many school personnel noted the lack of qualified teachers to provide services such as occupational and physical therapy, orientation and mobility training, and speech therapy. Parents requested access to non-educational funds to purchase assistive devices and other equipment that could be used at home to reinforce schoolwork. In a coordinated service delivery system, available resources such as service providers and assistive devices and technology could be used to their maximum advantage.

Coordinated service delivery also facilitates transition for students with disabilities as they progress from school to school, school to work, or to post-secondary opportunities. Parents and school personnel asked for better communication among regular and special educators as students progress from school to school throughout their educational careers. Student-focused, coordinated service delivery can facilitate such communication and help ease transition for students and their parents.

Service collaboratives should be designed to reflect the unique nature of the community and the families they serve, building on community strengths and targeting specific areas of need. Planning for coordinated service delivery and capacity building must involve the participation of all parties. Joint training opportunities for service providers from various agencies should be facilitated. All participants in service collaboratives must share their knowledge about available resources.

### **PARENTS AS EQUAL PARTNERS**

Outreach programs designed to provide early intervention for students with disabilities and their families significantly increase the chances for school success. Parents may be the first to recognize their child has a disability. Parents are a source of general knowledge about the nature of their child's disability, as well as particular knowledge about the capabilities of their child. In a system designed to be individually focused, parents play an integral role in the design of service

"Schools can prepare students in better ways when this endeavor becomes a shared responsibility with the community. From pre-school to adult life, all students are preparing to assume their roles in the larger community. All community members are stakeholders and potential team members in the planning and implementing of the education of its younger members. . . . From the individual taxpayer to private business to churches to government institutions, all must support and take an active, cooperative role in providing an education for all students."

—CASE Future Agenda for Special Education: Creating a Unified System

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delivery programs effective in promoting the development of the whole child and providing a foundation for future growth.

It is important that all participants in the coordinated service delivery system recognize the crucial role of family involvement in promoting educational attainment. Parents are the child's first teachers, and their role in preparing students with disabilities for success in school is a crucial one. Those involved in delivering educational or support services to students with disabilities and their families should value the vital information parents can provide.

In public hearings, parents all across the state repeatedly asked to be treated with respect and recognized as full-fledged members of the service delivery decision making team. They asked for training opportunities so they could reinforce the delivery of support services in the home. They also need information about available resources to be shared with them. Many parents reported feeling intimidated during the admission, review, and dismissal (ARD) process. They noted that ARD meetings were sometimes carried out without proper parental notification or explanation of parental rights. School staff must be diligent in fulfilling the requirement to educate parents concerning their rights and responsibilities in the service delivery process.

In many schools, parents have felt themselves and their children to be subordinate to the service delivery process itself. Clearly, educators must examine their beliefs concerning the role of parents in the educational process and guard against actions and statements which contribute to parents' impressions that their input is not valued. Likewise, parents need to acknowledge the professional role and expertise of educators. Both educators and parents must work to make changes in the process that will enhance the partnership between school and home.

### **LIFELONG COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND INTEGRATION**

Integration and participation in the life of the local community through education, employment, recreation, and service pursuits is the ultimate goal of service delivery. The educational program allows students

with disabilities the opportunity to develop skills that will support their future contributions as adults. Decisions about the short- and long-term goals of service delivery should be made with this in mind.

### **EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT**

Transition to post-secondary opportunities can be difficult to manage. Parents expressed a need for better transition planning services for students with disabilities. School staff and other service agencies must work with students and their parents early in the students' high school programs to develop goals for post-secondary employment, education, or training in order to adequately prepare them to meet the challenges they have set for future participation in the life of the community. At one high school visited by the task force, special education faculty and staff have developed a four-year transition planning process, which begins in the spring semester of eighth grade and continues through high school, with activities that build upon the previous year's work. At the end of the four years, students with disabilities have a personalized notebook which serves as a resource guide and covers such issues as the job application process, apartment rentals, savings and checking account services, and income tax preparation. The personalized notebook contains information and leads about job, education, or training opportunities that are of specific interest to the student.

Partnerships with local service providers, employers, institutions of higher education, and proprietary schools are key to the successful transition to meaningful post-secondary employment, education, or vocational training. These partnerships can assist schools in the identification of needed skills for job and training opportunities within the local community. They can also offer opportunities for students with disabilities to transfer knowledge and skills gained in the classroom to the worksite, increasing the likelihood of employment after completing their education. Studies have shown that students with disabilities who gain work experience during high school have a much higher post-secondary employment rate than students with similar disabilities who did not gain such experience. Work-based training and employment opportunities for students with disabilities need to be expanded, and schools must work together with local businesses

#### AGE-APPROPRIATE EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

Through a collaborative program involving a number of organizations, special education students in the McKinney and Plano Independent School Districts, as well as students in the 11 districts served by the Collin County Special Education Coop, complete their education at Collin County Community College. When these students turn 18, they enroll in the Collin County Community College program where they continue until they have completed the requirements for high school graduation or reach their twenty-second birthday. This program serves students who would not be able to attend classes on the community college campus without intensive support. Entrance to the program is not determined by type of disability, but by student need. The program is in its third year, and has served approximately 25 students.

The students in the program are in fully integrated classes, and the program facilitator works with professors to help foster classroom success. Students are enrolled in developmental literacy classes, recreation and leisure courses, and courses that may appeal to particular academic interests, such as history. No more than one full-stream student is enrolled in a class at a time in order to facilitate interactions with nondisabled peers. Fellow college students, who are employed as paid mentors, attend classes with the students enrolled in the program and tutor them after class. Many times, mentors will include them in social activities with other college students. Students follow a typical college schedule, with down time for study or recreational activities. They choose how to use their time. They join college organizations and attend sporting events.

Program students may spend half their day in classes and half in supported employment positions. Students who may not have the skills necessary for job placement spend their afternoons in internships on the campus or in the community, or they may participate in job sampling in order to gain experience. The students'

vocational adjustment class (VAC) counselors from high school work with them on the college campus as well, providing continuity for them. The program contracts with a local organization that also contracts with the Department of Mental Health Mental Retardation (MHMR) for supported employment. The program also works closely with the Texas Rehabilitation Commission (TRC). Thus, when students leave the program, they are already known to the community agencies that will be working with them as adults to achieve greater levels of independence.

The program facilitator cites as the program's major successes, the development of more adult-like behavior, increased problem-solving and independent thinking, a greater degree of independence, and a sense of value because they see themselves as college students. Having worked for many years as a special education teacher in a self-contained high school program, she notes that in high school, too much is done to protect the special education students. Their program is highly structured, and there are always bells and teachers around to tell them what to do and when to do it. "Here," she notes, "the students may fail, but they fail and learn. We allow them to fail in order to grow."

The program is funded by the school districts and assignment to the program is based on a student's IEP. The focus is on fitting the program to student needs, and not whether the student fits the program. The Collin County Community College program began as a "collective dream" of the Collin County Special Education Coop, MHMR, TRC, Region X ESC, and the Community College itself.

All those involved in the program, parents, students, professors, social service professionals, and school district staff, rate the program as highly successful. MHMR has been so impressed with the development of independent skills in students enrolled in the program, they have now contracted with the program to serve clients in the area over the age of 21 who they feel may benefit from the program.

### **VOCATIONAL SKILLS AND SUPPORTED TRAINING**

In Pharr San Juan Alamo ISD (PSJA), the school district has organized a community team, composed of representatives from various community agencies and training programs, that serves as a transition planning team for students with disabilities in the PSJA district. This team meets regularly to assess employment opportunities in the area for students with disabilities, recruit employers, and establish supported training sites. This community team also advises the school district concerning the curriculum for the vocational skills classes that students take so that they will have a better chance for success on the job.

Many of the students begin their supported training while in high school, working at such sites as the mailroom at the local newspaper office, fast food restaurants, hospitals and other institutional facilities, plant

nurseries, and building contractors. The employers note the positive attitudes of these employees, finding them committed to the job, with little absenteeism. They find that the additional training required for these employees is compensated by the low turnover rate. In addition, with supported training, much of the required training and supervision is coordinated between vocational adjustment class (VAC) counselors from the district and the Texas Rehabilitation Commission.

Why is this community team approach so successful? The ability to transfer skills is very important. It is critical that students with disabilities learn the necessary skills in environments similar to ones they will encounter upon entering the workforce or in independent living situations, thus increasing their ability to transfer and sustain newly learned skills.

to develop the capacity to train students with disabilities for the job opportunities available in their community. Apprenticeship and mentor programs, including career and applied technology programs, also need to be expanded. This would include school-based learning opportunities, as well as activities that would connect school-based and work-based training.

Post-secondary education and training opportunities are also keys to successful community participation. School staff need to be aware of the educational and training opportunities available to students with disabilities after completing their high school program and help to facilitate their enrollment in such programs.

### **RECREATION**

Opportunities for recreation and socialization contribute to personal happiness and well-being. While such opportunities are available to students with disabilities both within the curriculum and through extracurricular activities while they are in school, they diminish drastically upon completion of their educational program. Many adults with disabilities have few social contacts apart from family members.

Schools should help to foster interests and skills that can afford lifelong enjoyment. Associations between

school and community fine arts, sports, and special interest programs can increase the likelihood that students with disabilities may participate in recreational activities as adults.

### **CONTRIBUTIONS**

While most of this report has focused on the delivery of services to students with disabilities, it is important to remember that students have many valuable contributions to make to their communities. Young people have a need to contribute, for their lives to have a sense of purpose and significance beyond themselves; in short, they have a need to be needed. Communities should utilize this largely untapped resource. Students with disabilities should be fully integrated into the community service projects of the school and larger community. Volunteer organizations should seek to recruit students with disabilities as members, providing them with opportunities to give something back to their community. On the federal and state level, community service initiatives should be designed to incorporate all students. By fostering an interest in community involvement among their students, schools will be giving students their most valuable gift, an opportunity to find meaning in life.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Support the intellectual, academic, linguistic, social, emotional, and physical growth of all students by promoting high quality community services for students and their families.
- Provide accessible communication and facilities for all students to participate fully in the life of the school and work with community organizations to provide such access to community services.
- Work with schools to integrate all students into volunteer activities and community events to establish a participation pattern for later life.
- Support schools, as they plan for the transition of students with disabilities from school to work, with job placements.
- Provide expanded access for students with disabilities to training, recreational, and employment opportunities through current and emergent technologies.
- Provide accessible post-secondary education and training opportunities that have been designed to meet local community needs.
- Provide accurate information to parents regarding the services available in the school, as well as any school-related program evaluation information, that will enable them to participate more fully in the decision making for their student.
- Coordinate the transition planning activities to more fully involve all relevant parties as early as possible in the process.
- Work with area businesses to identify the skills needed in that job market, as well as the accommodations that could be made in jobs, to increase the employment of students with disabilities.
- Serve as a link between students with disabilities, their families, and the community services available to them.
- Provide information and training for students with disabilities, their families, and others in the community regarding legal rights and responsibilities in the education of students with disabilities.
- Provide training opportunities for the parents of students using various communication systems so that the students' skills can be reinforced continually.

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## IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

### **BUILD EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE AND EQUITY**

The task force calls for a comprehensive, coordinated effort to improve the quality of education for students with disabilities. As national reform efforts seek to raise educational content and performance standards, students with disabilities must be encompassed in those efforts. As the state sets standards for what students are to know and be able to do, expectations for students with disabilities must be incorporated into those standards. As the state designs and selects ways of holding schools accountable for student progress and achievement, students with disabilities must be included in that system. The task force recommends that all state-level educational initiatives, especially those to revise and reform curriculum and assessment, recognize and respond to issues related to students with disabilities as an integral part of the initiative. The development of alternative assessments for students with disabilities must become a priority so that their progress toward reaching these new standards can be measured appropriately.

In calling for a unified organizational structure, the task force reinforces its belief that all educators are responsible for the education of all students. Through a unified structure, the task force sees a realistic avenue for achieving educational excellence and equity for all

students, including those with disabilities. This unified structure must encompass all settings for students with disabilities and allow for the movement of students within the structure so that unique and individual needs can be met. The task force calls upon the state, regional, and local educational agencies to move toward an organization structure where special education is not considered a separate educational system. Educator preparation and certification requirements must support a more unified system in which educators are better prepared to meet a wider spectrum of student needs within the restructured classroom. The task force recommends that the Texas Education Agency initiate efforts to revise state and federal statutes or regulations which require the labeling of students as a requirement for receiving special education services. These labels reinforce the perception of separate systems of education for students with and without disabilities. These reforms present a considerable challenge and will require a carefully designed change process accompanied by long-term commitment of adequate resources.

### **DISSEMINATE INFORMATION**

The task force calls upon the Texas Education Agency to disseminate widely the State Board of Education *Policy Statement on the Education of Students with Disabilities* (1994) as well as the task force's rec-

ommendations and this report. This policy impacts everyone responsible for the education of students with disabilities from birth through age 21: the schools' professional and non-professional staff members, students, families, and community service agencies. By the intent of this policy statement and federal legislation, business and community organizations have enhanced responsibilities to employ and support individuals with disabilities after leaving school. The broadest possible distribution of this policy statement is essential to initiate dialogue among all those who must be involved. As stakeholders participate in the restructuring process, they are more likely to make and sustain the substantive changes required for students with disabilities to lead more productive lives.

The task force recommends that all feasible avenues for dissemination be used to reach the broadest possible audience. In addition to distribution of the printed documents, the Texas Education Agency should use electronic networks extensively and take advantage of state, regional, and national conferences to spread this information. The Texas Education Agency should produce and distribute a closed-captioned videotape explaining the policy statement, highlighting recommendations, and illustrating a selection of effective practices. The policy statement, as well as the task force's recommendations and report, must also be distributed in a format accessible to individuals who are blind or visually impaired.

### **PROVIDE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

From all stakeholders, the task force heard a common theme, that to improve the education of students with disabilities will require better prepared school staff members, especially classroom teachers. The State Board of Education's policy statement and the task force's recommendations cannot be accomplished without significant investments of time and money in high quality professional development. Learning to work in instructional teams and in flexible arrangements, as well as in partnerships with families and in collaboration with the community, will require not just inservice awareness sessions, but sustained support as changes are implemented within the classroom. Educator preparation programs must demonstrate that teachers and administrators exiting those programs are better prepared to make and support curricular and instructional modifications to accommodate various disabilities. As teachers acquire new knowledge and

skills, they will need time to reflect upon the success of their new practices and time to plan together with other educators to individualize instruction for all students. The task force calls upon the legislature to provide the financial support to gain the time and expertise needed to improve the education of students with disabilities.

### **INTEGRATE IMPLEMENTATION WITH ONGOING EFFORTS**

The Division of Elementary, Middle and High School Education has the primary responsibility within the Texas Education Agency for providing statewide leadership to implement the policies on early childhood/elementary, middle, and high schools. The division accomplishes this responsibility through networks of early childhood/elementary, middle, and high school educators, service providers, and allied professionals. Leadership is also provided through statewide conferences. As schools give increased emphasis to improving services for students with disabilities in early childhood/elementary, middle, high school, and post-secondary settings, the task force calls upon the existing networks and other training efforts to expand their focus to incorporate issues related to improving education for students with disabilities. Conferences, which already include opportunities for sharing effective reform strategies, should also focus on best practices for changing what happens in schools for students with disabilities. Membership in the existing networks should be expanded to include representatives of the various agencies involved with service delivery for students with disabilities.

### **ASSESS THE POLICY'S IMPLEMENTATION**

One of the first concerns voiced by the task force was a concern that the policy actually have an impact, that it would not be just a statement adopted by the State Board of Education and then ignored in practice by educators and others. Indeed, the first question often asked of task force members as they met in schools or held public hearings was, "What happens next?" *A Leadership Initiative for Improving Special Education Services in Texas* (January 1993) and *A Leadership Initiative for Improving the Education of Students Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing* (November 1992) must be reviewed and revised to ensure their compatibility with this policy statement, since it represents the direction of the State Board of Education. The task

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force recommends that the Texas Education Agency conduct an annual review of the implementation status of the *Policy Statement on the Education of Students with Disabilities* (1994) and report the results to the State Board of Education. The task force's recommendations and report could provide a beginning framework for such a review. A commitment to an annual status report emphasizes the need for a process of continuous improvement. As a group with significant expertise and interest in students with disabilities and the issues addressed by the policy, this task force is a valuable resource which should be incorporated into the policy implementation assessment process.

### **ESTABLISH A COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAM OF RESEARCH**

As districts and campuses restructure educational programs and changes occur in schools and classrooms, rich opportunities to study and disseminate what is learned often slip away. This task force supports the design and implementation of a program of research focused upon the changes made in classrooms, campuses and districts, and communities in response to this policy statement and the task force recommendations. Such a program of research would examine changes in student growth, development, and achieve-

ment associated with restructuring schools for all students, as well as improving services for students with disabilities. There is a need for comprehensive, longitudinal research that will systematically identify creative ideas and effective suggestions for improving educational practice. These ideas and suggestions can then be disseminated and adapted by other classrooms, campuses, and communities.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION**

The recommendations of the task force for making the vision contained in the *Policy Statement on the Education of Students with Disabilities* (1994) a reality for the Texas public education system are presented in the following chart. It indicates the persons and organizations that will have some level of responsibility or involvement in carrying the recommendations forward. In looking at the chart, it becomes clear that realizing the vision for excellence and equity for all our students requires shared commitment and the participation of all members of our society. The task force encourages Texans to do what it takes to create an educational system within the larger society that fosters the development of all its students and provides a foundation for them to lead fulfilling lives.

| <b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b><br><br><b>FROM THE</b><br><b>TASK FORCE ON THE</b><br><b>EDUCATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES</b>                                                                                                                                                                 | LEGISLATURE | STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION | TEXAS EDUCATION AGENCY | EDUCATION SERVICE CENTERS | DISTRICTS, CAMPUSES, AND CLASSROOMS | EDUCATION PREPARATION PROGRAMS | FAMILIES | COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS AND AGENCIES | POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION AND TRAINING | EMPLOYERS |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|--------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------|
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |             |                          |                        |                           |                                     |                                |          |                                      |                                       |           |
| <b>MISSION AND PHILOSOPHY</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |             |                          |                        |                           |                                     |                                |          |                                      |                                       |           |
| Establish educational goals, based on high expectations, to enable students with disabilities to achieve their fullest potential in intellectual, academic, linguistic, social, emotional, and physical growth and development.                                                             | •           | •                        | •                      | •                         | •                                   | •                              | •        | •                                    | •                                     | •         |
| Develop individual plans for students with disabilities driven by meaningful skills and knowledge and reflective of each student's individual needs and highest potential.                                                                                                                  |             |                          |                        | •                         | •                                   |                                | •        | •                                    |                                       |           |
| Design and deliver services based on the needs of student, not on the availability of services.                                                                                                                                                                                             | •           |                          |                        | •                         | •                                   |                                | •        | •                                    | •                                     |           |
| Ensure sufficient funds to serve students with disabilities in learning environments where they are most likely to achieve their full educational potential as determined by their individual plans. Seek additional funds, if necessary, to provide the services needed.                   | •           |                          | •                      |                           | •                                   |                                |          | •                                    |                                       |           |
| Support amendments to state and federal legislation that remove requirements and incentives for labeling students according to disability in order to secure necessary funding for services, but preserve sufficient funding to provide services to students with highly specialized needs. | •           | •                        | •                      |                           |                                     |                                | •        | •                                    |                                       |           |
| Support legislation that provides students with disabilities access to appropriate curricula and learning environments needed to successfully complete their individual plans.                                                                                                              | •           | •                        | •                      |                           | •                                   |                                |          |                                      |                                       |           |
| Review and amend rules which may hinder school districts and campuses in developing appropriate heterogeneous learning environments to meet the needs of most students with disabilities within the educational mainstream.                                                                 |             | •                        | •                      |                           |                                     |                                |          |                                      |                                       |           |
| Ensure that students receive special education services on the basis of disability, not culture, race, or gender.                                                                                                                                                                           |             |                          | •                      | •                         | •                                   |                                | •        |                                      |                                       |           |
| Promote involvement in the total school program by providing timely information to students and parents about the range of school-wide activities, programs, and supports available to all students.                                                                                        |             |                          |                        | •                         | •                                   |                                |          | •                                    |                                       |           |

| <b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b><br><br><b>FROM THE</b><br><b>TASK FORCE ON THE</b><br><b>EDUCATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | LEGISLATURE | STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION | TEXAS EDUCATION AGENCY | EDUCATION SERVICE CENTERS | DISTRICTS, CAMPUSES, AND CLASSROOMS | EDUCATION PREPARATION PROGRAMS | FAMILIES | COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS AND AGENCIES | POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION AND TRAINING | EMPLOYERS |
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|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |             |                          |                        |                           |                                     |                                |          |                                      |                                       |           |
| <b>ASSESSMENT, CURRICULUM, AND INSTRUCTION</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |             |                          |                        |                           |                                     |                                |          |                                      |                                       |           |
| Review the state assessment system and make recommendations regarding appropriate techniques for all students which will accommodate students with disabilities, accurately evaluating their growth and achievement. Develop alternative assessments to TAAS within the individual plan and ensure that modifications and accommodations are consistent with classroom adjustments. |             | •                        | •                      | •                         | •                                   | •                              |          |                                      |                                       |           |
| Adopt clearly defined goals within a well-balanced curriculum that address the general and disability-specific needs of students to prepare them for maximum participation in their communities.                                                                                                                                                                                    |             | •                        | •                      | •                         | •                                   |                                |          |                                      |                                       |           |
| Support innovative responses in districts and campuses to the learning needs of students with disabilities through increased discretionary funding.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | •           | •                        | •                      | •                         | •                                   |                                |          |                                      |                                       |           |
| Inform teachers of the range of allowable modifications related to the TAAS for students with disabilities. Ensure that teachers make appropriate modifications in the testing situation consistent with those made in classroom instruction.                                                                                                                                       |             |                          | •                      | •                         | •                                   | •                              |          |                                      |                                       |           |
| Design modifications in curriculum, instruction, and assessment so that students will move toward increasing levels of independence.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |             |                          | •                      | •                         | •                                   | •                              |          |                                      |                                       |           |
| Modify or select classroom assessments appropriate to individual learning plans to gain more accurate measurement of student progress and the success of classroom instruction.                                                                                                                                                                                                     |             |                          |                        | •                         | •                                   | •                              |          |                                      |                                       |           |
| Educate students with disabilities about their rights and responsibilities so that, over the course of their educational program, they can assume increasing responsibility for making choices among their options.                                                                                                                                                                 |             |                          | •                      | •                         | •                                   |                                | •        | •                                    |                                       |           |
| Educate parents regarding their rights and responsibilities so that they will be informed members of teams that develop the individual plans for students with disabilities. Encourage and support parental involvement throughout this process.                                                                                                                                    |             |                          | •                      | •                         | •                                   |                                |          | •                                    |                                       |           |
| Create learning opportunities which encourage meaningful interactions between students with disabilities and their peers with and without disabilities.                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |             |                          |                        | •                         | •                                   |                                | •        | •                                    | •                                     | •         |

| <b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b><br><br><b>FROM THE</b><br><b>TASK FORCE ON THE</b><br><b>EDUCATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | LEGISLATURE | STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION | TEXAS EDUCATION AGENCY | EDUCATION SERVICE CENTERS | DISTRICTS, CAMPUSES, AND CLASSROOMS | EDUCATION PREPARATION PROGRAMS | FAMILIES | COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS AND AGENCIES | POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION AND TRAINING | EMPLOYERS |
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|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |             |                          |                        |                           |                                     |                                |          |                                      |                                       |           |
| Prepare students with disabilities for competitive jobs available within their local communities.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |             |                          |                        | •                         | •                                   |                                |          | •                                    | •                                     | •         |
| Provide realistic, substantive career planning so that students with disabilities leave public schools with marketable skills or skill levels sufficient for post-secondary training opportunities.                                                                                                                                                                                          |             |                          |                        | •                         | •                                   |                                | •        |                                      | •                                     | •         |
| Provide opportunities for students to learn communication systems that will enable them to communicate with students who are disabled.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |             |                          | •                      | •                         | •                                   | •                              | •        | •                                    |                                       |           |
| Involve regular education teachers in the development and assessment of individual plans.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |             | •                        |                        | •                         | •                                   | •                              |          |                                      |                                       |           |
| Recognize that students with auditory and visual impairments have specific needs for certain curricula which can be delivered through an array of environments and that they may benefit from social and academic interactions with other students with similar disabilities.                                                                                                                | •           | •                        | •                      | •                         | •                                   | •                              |          |                                      |                                       |           |
| <b>PROFESSIONAL GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |             |                          |                        |                           |                                     |                                |          |                                      |                                       |           |
| Work with educator preparation programs to prepare all educators to meet many of the educational needs of students with disabilities and to develop an accepting and supportive climate for students with disabilities within their classrooms.                                                                                                                                              | •           | •                        | •                      | •                         | •                                   | •                              | •        |                                      |                                       |           |
| Allocate sufficient time within the school day for teachers to plan, discuss, and prepare before significant changes in student placements are made through the individual planning process. Increasing the number of conference and planning days within the school year or increasing the length of the school day or year may be avenues to secure additional professional planning time. |             | •                        | •                      |                           | •                                   |                                |          |                                      |                                       |           |
| Seek necessary funds to provide additional compensation to teachers as they take on new roles, such as team leadership, with expanded responsibilities in restructured schools.                                                                                                                                                                                                              | •           | •                        | •                      |                           | •                                   |                                |          |                                      |                                       |           |
| Allocate time for ongoing planning and consultation throughout the school year to support the delivery of services for students with disabilities.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |             |                          | •                      |                           | •                                   |                                |          |                                      |                                       |           |

| <b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b><br><br><b>FROM THE</b><br><b>TASK FORCE ON THE</b><br><b>EDUCATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | LEGISLATURE | STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION | TEXAS EDUCATION AGENCY | EDUCATION SERVICE CENTERS | DISTRICTS, CAMPUSES, AND CLASSROOMS | EDUCATION PREPARATION PROGRAMS | FAMILIES | COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS AND AGENCIES | POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION AND TRAINING | EMPLOYERS |
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|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |             |                          |                        |                           |                                     |                                |          |                                      |                                       |           |
| Improve the quality and frequency of communication between regular and special educators through such practices as teaching teams, common planning periods, access to technology, and co-teaching.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |             |                          | •                      | •                         | •                                   | •                              |          |                                      |                                       |           |
| Provide resources for comprehensive staff development opportunities for all school staff working with students with disabilities.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | •           |                          | •                      | •                         | •                                   | •                              |          |                                      |                                       |           |
| Provide staff development in consensus decision making; working with parents; accessing community resources; working with professionals from community and social service agencies; working in a team environment; addressing multi-dimensional learning for each child; making modifications to curricula, instructional strategies, and assessment; using instructional technology and assistive devices in the classroom; creating peer social support systems; implementing continuous progress classrooms; managing behavior problems efficiently; and meeting legal and ethical standards. |             |                          | •                      | •                         | •                                   | •                              |          |                                      | •                                     |           |
| Expect continuous, career-long professional growth and improvement from all educators.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |             | •                        | •                      | •                         | •                                   | •                              | •        |                                      | •                                     |           |
| Provide a variety of delivery mechanisms for staff development such as peer observations, team visits to exemplary campus programs, time within the school day dedicated to team discussion and planning, self-evaluation, or reflection on current practices.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |             |                          | •                      | •                         | •                                   | •                              |          |                                      |                                       |           |
| Increase joint staff development activities for regular and special educators while also providing staff development in the unique needs of various disability areas.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |             |                          | •                      | •                         | •                                   | •                              |          |                                      | •                                     |           |
| Evaluate inservice programs for educators and hold the programs accountable for achieving desired results.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |             |                          | •                      | •                         | •                                   |                                |          |                                      |                                       |           |
| Develop incentives to attract more teachers to become certified in identified shortage areas related to students with disabilities.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |             | •                        | •                      |                           |                                     | •                              |          |                                      | •                                     |           |

| <b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b><br><br><b>FROM THE</b><br><b>TASK FORCE ON THE</b><br><b>EDUCATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | LEGISLATURE | STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION | TEXAS EDUCATION AGENCY | EDUCATION SERVICE CENTERS | DISTRICTS, CAMPUSES, AND CLASSROOMS | EDUCATION PREPARATION PROGRAMS | FAMILIES | COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS AND AGENCIES | POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION AND TRAINING | EMPLOYERS |
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|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |             |                          |                        |                           |                                     |                                |          |                                      |                                       |           |
| Collaborate with preservice and inservice programs to educate teachers for new roles, such as team members, consulting teachers, members of transition planning teams, working with interpreters, or supervisors of instructional aides, which support educating increasing numbers of students with disabilities within the regular classroom.                                |             |                          | •                      | •                         | •                                   | •                              |          |                                      |                                       |           |
| Require the curriculum of preservice preparation programs to include knowledge and skills all educators need to work with most students with disabilities.                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |             | •                        | •                      |                           |                                     | •                              |          |                                      |                                       |           |
| Collaborate with institutions of higher education to increase opportunities for student teaching to occur in settings where the preservice teachers learn to work with students with disabilities in a supportive environment.                                                                                                                                                 |             | •                        | •                      |                           | •                                   | •                              |          |                                      |                                       |           |
| Extend preparation programs to enable all preservice teachers to experience more classroom application of their formal instruction in meeting the needs of students with disabilities. One avenue for this extension would be an internship year to replace student teaching.                                                                                                  | •           | •                        | •                      |                           | •                                   | •                              |          |                                      |                                       |           |
| Assess preservice programs on the basis of the performances of their students; expect programs to improve over time; and base continued program approval on the performances of their graduates.                                                                                                                                                                               |             | •                        | •                      | •                         | •                                   | •                              |          |                                      |                                       |           |
| <b>ORGANIZATION</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |             |                          |                        |                           |                                     |                                |          |                                      |                                       |           |
| Implement organizational, staffing, and budgeting practices that support an integrated delivery of services by regular and special education.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |             | •                        | •                      | •                         | •                                   |                                |          |                                      |                                       |           |
| Remove organizational barriers which prevent students with disabilities from being educated with their nondisabled peers. Do not establish barriers that would prevent students with specific disabilities from learning in settings with other students with similar disabilities.                                                                                            |             | •                        | •                      | •                         | •                                   | •                              |          | •                                    |                                       |           |
| Educate all students with disabilities in the neighborhood school when the individualized planning process determines it to be the appropriate setting for the delivery of needed services. Maintain choices in educational settings for students with specific disabilities at different points in their growth and development based upon their unique and individual needs. | •           |                          | •                      | •                         | •                                   |                                |          | •                                    |                                       |           |

| RECOMMENDATIONS<br><br>FROM THE<br>TASK FORCE ON THE<br>EDUCATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES                                                                                                            | LEGISLATURE | STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION | TEXAS EDUCATION AGENCY | EDUCATION SERVICE CENTERS | DISTRICTS, CAMPUSES, AND CLASSROOMS | EDUCATION PREPARATION PROGRAMS | FAMILIES | COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS AND AGENCIES | POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION AND TRAINING | EMPLOYERS |
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|                                                                                                                                                                                                            |             |                          |                        |                           |                                     |                                |          |                                      |                                       |           |
| Emphasize the shared responsibility of all educators for educating students with disabilities through the campus decision making process.                                                                  |             |                          | •                      | •                         | •                                   | •                              |          |                                      |                                       |           |
| Integrate comprehensive and appropriate information on the progress and achievement of students with disabilities into state and local accountability systems for districts and campuses.                  |             | •                        | •                      | •                         | •                                   |                                |          |                                      |                                       |           |
| Implement greater flexibility in scheduling so that teachers are able to plan and teach as colleagues to better meet the needs of all students.                                                            |             |                          | •                      |                           | •                                   |                                |          |                                      |                                       |           |
| Cooperate with other agencies to secure better post-secondary social, educational, and community services for students with disabilities.                                                                  |             |                          | •                      | •                         | •                                   |                                |          | •                                    | •                                     |           |
| Implement organizational and planning practices that ensure a smooth transition for students with disabilities when moving from one educational setting to another and from school to work.                |             |                          |                        | •                         | •                                   |                                | •        | •                                    | •                                     | •         |
| Seek legislative changes to allow campus flexibility in the use of funds.                                                                                                                                  | •           | •                        | •                      |                           |                                     |                                |          |                                      |                                       |           |
| Adjust teacher-pupil ratios in classes with mainstreamed students requiring significant modifications, giving priority to creating the most effective, equitable educational environment for all students. | •           | •                        |                        |                           | •                                   |                                |          |                                      |                                       |           |
| Provide state of the art technology to serve the specific needs of students and to provide necessary instructional and administrative supports for teachers and other staff.                               | •           | •                        | •                      | •                         | •                                   |                                |          |                                      |                                       |           |
| <b>FAMILY AND COMMUNITY</b>                                                                                                                                                                                |             |                          |                        |                           |                                     |                                |          |                                      |                                       |           |
| Support the intellectual, academic, linguistic, social, emotional and physical growth of all students by promoting high quality community services for students and their families.                        |             |                          |                        |                           | •                                   |                                |          | •                                    |                                       |           |
| Provide accessible communication and facilities for all students to participate fully in the life of the school and work with community organizations to provide such access to community services.        |             |                          |                        |                           | •                                   |                                |          | •                                    |                                       |           |

| RECOMMENDATIONS<br><br>FROM THE<br>TASK FORCE ON THE<br>EDUCATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES                                                                                                                                                 | LEGISLATURE | STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION | TEXAS EDUCATION AGENCY | EDUCATION SERVICE CENTERS | DISTRICTS, CAMPUSES, AND CLASSROOMS | EDUCATION PREPARATION PROGRAMS | FAMILIES | COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS AND AGENCIES | POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION AND TRAINING | EMPLOYERS |
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|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |             |                          |                        |                           |                                     |                                |          |                                      |                                       |           |
| Work with schools to integrate all students with disabilities into volunteer activities and community events to establish a participation pattern for later life.                                                                               |             |                          |                        |                           | •                                   |                                | •        | •                                    |                                       |           |
| Support schools, as they plan for the transition of students with disabilities from school to work, with job placements.                                                                                                                        |             |                          |                        |                           |                                     |                                | •        | •                                    | •                                     | •         |
| Provide expanded access for students with disabilities to training, recreational, and employment opportunities through current and emergent technologies.                                                                                       |             |                          |                        |                           | •                                   |                                | •        | •                                    | •                                     | •         |
| Provide accessible post-secondary education and training opportunities that have been designed to meet local community needs.                                                                                                                   |             |                          |                        |                           |                                     |                                |          |                                      | •                                     |           |
| Provide accurate information to parents regarding the services available in the school, as well as any school-related program evaluation information, that will enable them to participate more fully in the decision making for their student. |             |                          |                        |                           | •                                   |                                |          |                                      |                                       |           |
| Coordinate the transition planning activities to more fully involve all relevant parties as early as possible in the process.                                                                                                                   |             |                          |                        |                           | •                                   |                                | •        | •                                    | •                                     | •         |
| Work with area businesses to identify the skills needed in that job market, as well as the accommodations that could be made in jobs, to increase the employment of students with disabilities.                                                 |             |                          |                        |                           | •                                   |                                |          | •                                    | •                                     | •         |
| Serve as a link between students with disabilities, their families, and the community services available to them.                                                                                                                               |             |                          |                        |                           | •                                   |                                |          |                                      |                                       |           |
| Provide information and training for students with disabilities, their families, and others in the community regarding legal rights and responsibilities in the education of students with disabilities.                                        |             |                          | •                      | •                         | •                                   |                                |          |                                      |                                       |           |
| Provide training opportunities for the parents of students using various communication systems so that the students' skills can be reinforced continually.                                                                                      |             |                          |                        | •                         | •                                   |                                |          | •                                    | •                                     |           |

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Canyon High School, Canyon ISD  
College Station ISD  
Collin County Community College, Plano ISD  
Crockett Middle School, Amarillo ISD  
Dobbs Elementary, Rockwall ISD  
El Paso Regional Day School Program for the Deaf  
Elkins High School, Fort Bend ISD  
Erma Nash Elementary, Mansfield ISD  
Farias Elementary School, Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD  
Goree School, Goree ISD  
J. J. Pearce High School, Richardson ISD  
J. L. Boren Elementary, Mansfield ISD  
Kirby Math/Science Center, Wichita Falls ISD  
Klein Forest High School, Klein ISD  
Klenk Elementary, Klein ISD  
Kookan Education Center, Arlington ISD  
Lakeview Elementary, Canyon ISD  
Lamar Elementary, Amarillo ISD  
Mary Orr Intermediate School, Mansfield ISD  
McAuliffe Elementary, McAllen ISD

McCulloch Middle School, Highland Park ISD  
Memorial Parkway Junior High, Katy ISD  
Mitchell Elementary, Plano ISD  
Olney Elementary, Olney ISD  
PSJA High School South, Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD  
Quail Valley Elementary, Fort Bend ISD  
Ridgecrest Elementary, Amarillo ISD  
Scotsdale Elementary, Ysleta ISD  
Seymour Elementary, Seymour ISD  
South Texas Science Academy, South Texas ISD  
Taylor High School, Katy ISD  
Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired  
Texas School for the Deaf  
Webb Elementary, Arlington ISD  
Ysleta Learning Center, Ysleta ISD

Region I  
Region IV  
Region VI  
Region IX  
Region X  
Region XI  
Region XVI  
Region XIX

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## COMPLIANCE STATEMENT

### **TITLE VI, CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1964; THE MODIFIED COURT ORDER, CIVIL ACTION 5281, FEDERAL DISTRICT COURT, EASTERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS, TYLER DIVISION.**

Reviews of local education agencies pertaining to compliance with Title VI Civil Rights Act of 1964 and with specific requirements of the Modified Court Order, Civil Action No. 5281, Federal District Court, Eastern District of Texas, Tyler Division are conducted periodically by staff representatives of the Texas Education Agency. These reviews cover at least the following policies and practices:

- (1) acceptance policies on student transfers from other school districts;
- (2) operation of school bus routes or runs on a nonsegregated basis;
- (3) nondiscrimination in extracurricular activities and the use of school facilities;
- (4) nondiscriminatory practices in the hiring, assigning, promoting, paying, demoting, reassigning, or dismissing of faculty and staff members who work with children;
- (5) enrollment and assignment of students without discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin;
- (6) nondiscriminatory practices relating to the use of a student's first language; and
- (7) evidence of published procedures for hearing complaints and grievances.

In addition to conducting reviews, the Texas Education Agency staff representatives check complaints of discrimination made by a citizen or citizens residing in a school district where it is alleged discriminatory practices have occurred or are occurring.

Where a violation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act is found, the findings are reported to the Office for Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education.

If there is a direct violation of the Court Order in Civil Action No. 5281 that cannot be cleared through negotiation, the sanctions required by the Court Order are applied.

### **TITLE VII, CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1964 AS AMENDED BY THE EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY ACT OF 1972; EXECUTIVE ORDERS 11246 AND 11375; EQUAL PAY ACT OF 1964; TITLE IX, EDUCATION AMENDMENTS; REHABILITATION ACT OF 1973 AS AMENDED; 1974 AMENDMENTS TO THE WAGE-HOUR LAW EXPANDING THE AGE DISCRIMINATION IN EMPLOYMENT ACT OF 1967; VIETNAM ERA VETERANS READJUSTMENT ASSISTANCE ACT OF 1972 AS AMENDED; IMMIGRATION REFORM AND CONTROL ACT OF 1986; AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT OF 1990; AND THE CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1991.**

The Texas Education Agency shall comply fully with the nondiscrimination provisions of all federal and state laws, rules, and regulations by assuring that no person shall be excluded from consideration for recruitment, selection, appointment, training, promotion, retention, or any other personnel action, or be denied any benefits or participation in any educational programs or activities which it operates on the grounds of race, religion, color, national origin, sex, disability, age, or veteran status (except where age, sex, or disability constitutes a *bona fide* occupational qualification necessary to proper and efficient administration). The Texas Education Agency is an Equal Employment Opportunity/Affirmative Action employer.



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AUSTIN, TEXAS 78701-1494**

**GE5 601 06  
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